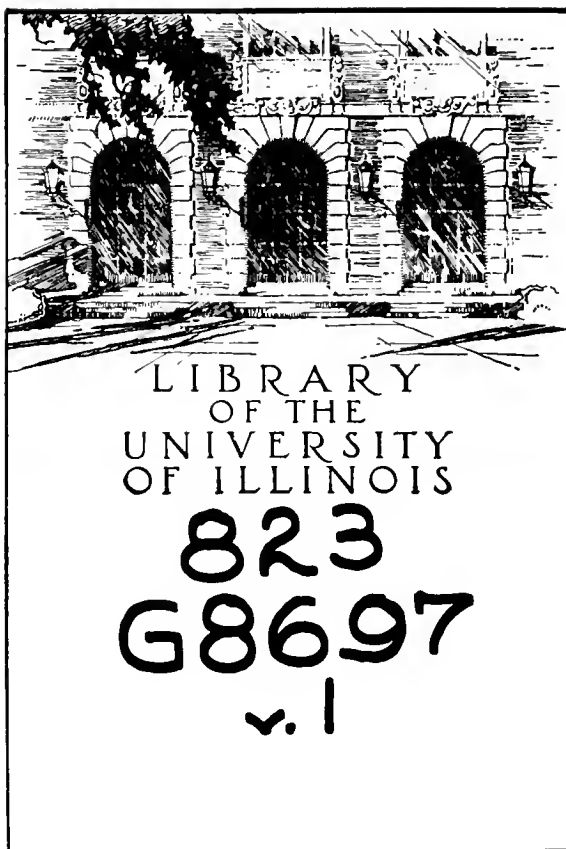
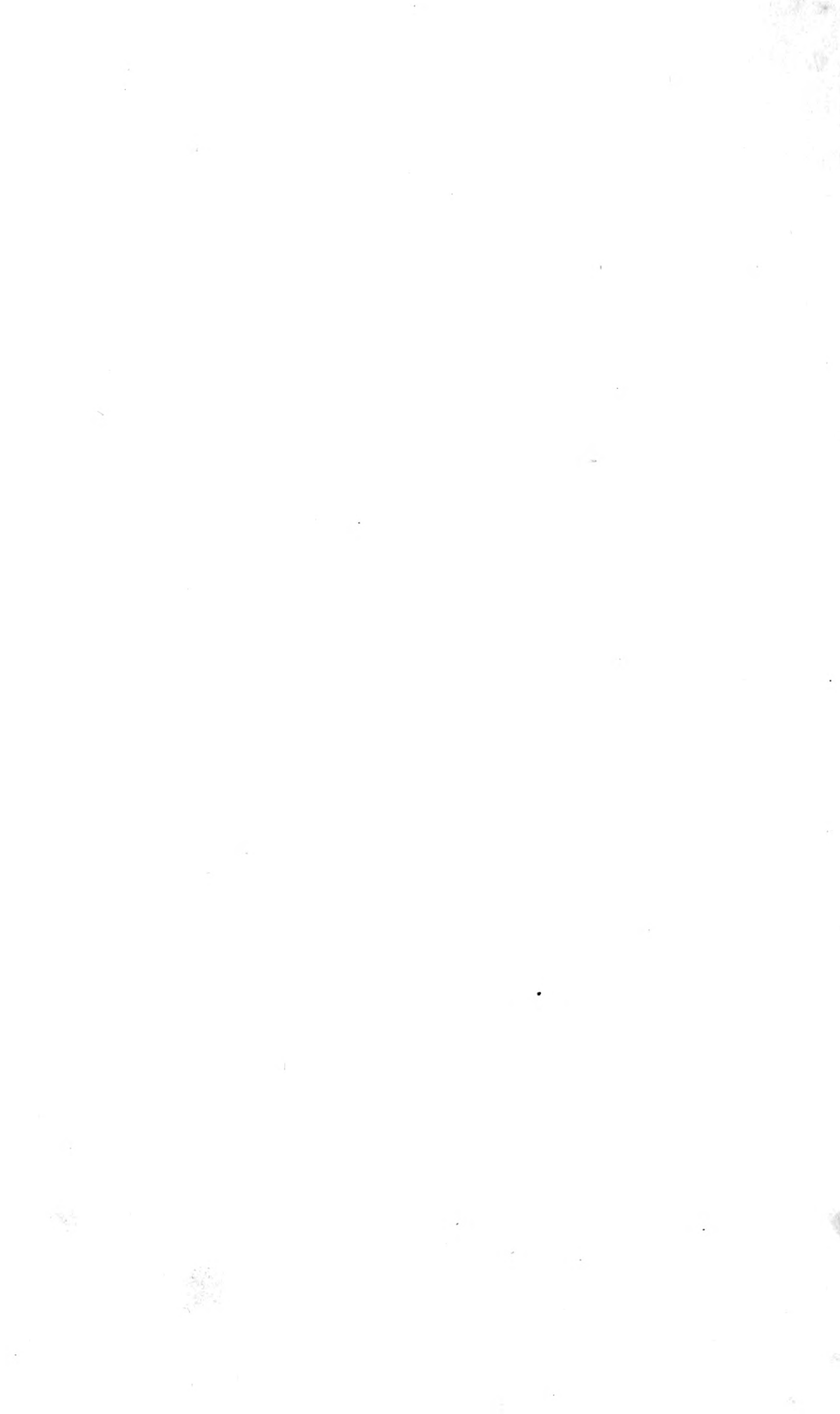
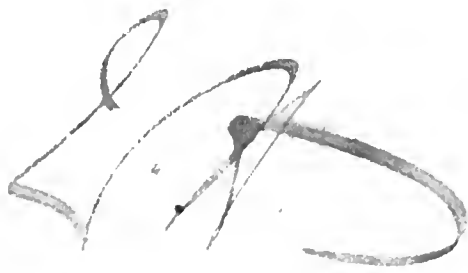


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GREYMORE:

A Story of Country Life.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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GREYMORE:

A STORY OF COUNTRY LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SISTERS.

“Look, Hester, is not that Agatha walking by the river?” said Katharine Rivers, to her sister.

“Yes,” returned Hester; “shall we ask her to go with us to Fairfield?”

“I am afraid our errand is not much in her way,” said Katharine; “but it seems strange to leave her walking alone in the same direction as ourselves. We can ask her, at any rate; but Agatha never appears to take any interest in what we do, and if we talk to her about our new dresses, she will look as if she thought us very frivolous.”

“I wish she would become more at home with us,” said Hester. “Let me see: it must be more than four months since she came to us, and she seems as gloomy as ever.”

“And her heavy masses of crape cast a shadow over us, as if to reproach us for our slighter mourning. I almost dread putting on coloured dresses; there will seem so much difference between us then, and we ought to be exactly like real sisters, after all.”

“I am sure mamma would never let her feel that she was not one of us,” said Hester, “if only she herself did not appear so determined that *our* mother should be merely *her* stepmother. Do you think, Katharine, that Agatha has any real affection for any one of us?”

“I hope so: indeed, I am sure she really does care for all of us; and think how affectionate her heart must actually be, from the way she loved her grandfather and aunt! When once she is accustomed to us, and gives herself up a little more to present things, I feel sure her love will be worth having.”

“Yes; no doubt her heart is really warm,” said Hester, with, however, some doubt in her tone; “but it appears to me so difficult to reach her heart at all! I feel quite chilled, and I am sure mamma, with all her efforts, feels the same.”

“Don’t let us speak any more of Agatha just now,” said Katharine; “we shall join her directly, and I always feel uncomfortable when I meet people just after I have been talking about them.”

The two girls who had been exchanging these

remarks, were walking through some pleasant green fields on a mild spring evening, one of the earliest in May. A little stream, in its windings, occasionally neared their path, and again was lost to view behind the clumps of trees which dotted the meadows, and gave to the scenery a somewhat park-like appearance. The general characteristics of the surrounding country seemed to be fertility and cultivation. The rich pastures and neat hedgerows spoke of agricultural prosperity, whilst the woodland portion of the landscape took off the *tameness* of aspect which appears to be so frequently the accompaniment of "good land."

Though no rugged mountain peaks attracted the gaze, no massive hill-chains skirted the horizon, the country could not exactly be termed flat; gently swelling hills divided the plain into numerous little valleys, and the whole character of the landscape was slightly undulating. Cottages at intervals peeped out amongst the trees, or were seen, on the side of some sheltered bank; and the church tower of Fairfield at a little distance, and faint indications of smoke curling upwards in its vicinity, showed that this was no untenanted wild. On the very margin of the stream, the person was walking who had given rise to the conversation between the sisters:—a solitary, tall figure, dressed in mourning so deep that it would have been conspicuous anywhere, and which looked strangely out of place in the smiling landscape. She

was a young woman of perhaps two or three and twenty, though she might have seemed more, from the subdued, fixed expression of her face. Pale and thin, with well-cut, what are commonly called "aristocratic" features; large dark eyes, penetrating, though not bright; massive bands of black hair defining the outline of her cheeks; with a well-formed but not graceful figure, a decided step, and a commanding air: she might be said to possess many of the elements of beauty and yet to be singularly devoid of attractions. And she was evidently equally careless of them. Her black bonnet was unrelieved by trimming, and only served to sharpen the outline of her pale face; her dress was severe to the last degree in its simplicity; and her mantle with its heavy crape folds, hung ungracefully from her shoulders, and, as well as the skirt of her dress, fell in the stiff manner that may be seen in some of the pictures of modern pre-Raphaelites. The two girls who joined her presented together a striking contrast to her, and individually almost as great a contrast to each other, though at first they generally struck strangers as being alike. Both were slightly above the middle height, though considerably shorter and smaller than their half-sister, and both had *fair* and clear complexions, but Hester's was the brighter of the two, and her figure somewhat less slight than Katharine's. Both had hazel or brown eyes and brown hair, but Katharine's eyes had more of the

hazel, and her hair more of the chesnut tinge than her sister's. The main difference was in expression, which in Katharine's face was much more developed, as perhaps her two years of seniority might warrant.

As far as mere features and colouring were concerned, Hester was undoubtedly the prettiest, but Katharine had some compensating advantages which made her to many equally attractive. Both were young, bright, and happy, and contrasted forcibly enough with the sad-looking Agatha. As they approached her, she started slightly, and then said in a cold, indifferent tone: "I did not know you were out this evening."

"We are going to Fairfield to do some shopping," said Katharine; "we thought perhaps you would come with us."

"I think I will," returned Agatha, after a moment's consideration. "I shall be able to hear whether the man at the book-shop has got the books I wanted. But it is rather late for shopping, is it not?"

"Oh, no! we often go to Fairfield in the evening, and the light is good enough to choose white muslin dresses."

"Dresses! are you going to buy dresses?" inquired Agatha, rather, however, in a mechanical manner than with an appearance of much interest in the subject.

"Yes," returned Katharine, half laughing. "Did you not hear us talking about them this afternoon?"

I am sure Hester and I had a very audible discussion on the economy of the question."

"I had forgotten," said Agatha. "I suppose you want them for the party you were speaking of at breakfast this morning," she continued, with some effort at being interested. "I did not know it was a grand enough affair to require new dresses."

"Oh, it is not grand at all; only mamma thought we ought to ask the people we met at Uncle James's last night, particularly as the Grovers will soon be going away. We should not have wanted new dresses, had we been out of mourning."

"I don't see we want them very particularly as it is," interrupted Hester.

"Oh, pray don't commence the discussion again, Hester," said Katharine. "We have worn our black *barèges* at every place we have been to, and being in mourning, none of our other dresses will do. Besides, plain white muslin dresses are always useful. I never remember being without one before. You know mamma agreed that it was not extravagant."

Agatha remained silent, with an expression very like contempt during Katharine's animated defence, and the allusion to the mourning seemed to strike her painfully. Katharine did not notice it, but continued as if to support, to herself, her reasons for having a new dress.

"Of course, Hester, if we were out of mourning

I should say nothing about it. Certainly, it is a pity we cannot wear our worked muslins ; but you know you agreed with me, that it would be a pity to alter the coloured trimming just for one night, particularly as we shall only wear mourning a few weeks longer."

Here Katharine's conscience warned her that she might be speaking in a way to hurt Agatha's feelings. She stopped abruptly and looked towards Agatha, who was now walking on at a little distance. She could not see her face, but she fancied in her very step and gestures she could trace an increased gloom. She was vexed with herself for her thoughtlessness and selfishness, in being so occupied with the interest of a new dress, as to forget that her words might be painful to another. Besides, Agatha was a person to whom it was extremely difficult to make anything like an apology ; it was a great chance that she would allow she had been annoyed, or even appear to have noticed what had been said. Katharine, however, could never rest under the idea of having displeased any one, so she resolved to make some sort of indirect acknowledgment of her carelessness. Going up close to Agatha, and walking along by her side, she said, after a moment or two of silence—

"I am afraid, Agatha, you think me very frivolous for caring so much about my dress ; but when I am interested in anything, however trifling, I forget everything else for the time, and I am often vexed

with myself afterwards for the things I have said."

"Not frivolous," said Agatha, replying to the first part of the speech: "I should not call you *frivolous* exactly, but inconsistent and inconstant."

"Oh! Agatha, not inconsistent; at least, only in trifles."

"I know nothing of you with respect to more important things," said Agatha. "I only mean in your tastes and pursuits. It is inconceivable to me how you can give yourself up one day so completely to one thing, and the next be equally in earnest about something else."

"Have you noticed that in Katharine?" asked Hester.

"Yes, frequently: you seem surprised, Hester."

"I fancied you scarcely remarked our ways," said Hester, "and that you would be a long time in finding out our peculiarities."

Agatha made no reply, except a slight smile, not exactly a pleasant one: an expression of mingled amusement and contempt. It was not calculated to raise the spirits of those who saw it, and the remainder of the walk to Fairfield passed in silence.

In compliment to Agatha, whom they still treated somewhat like a visitor, the girls proceeded first to the book-shop, though it was rather out of their way. The errand, however, was a fruitless one; the London

parcel was not expected for two days, so Agatha must wait patiently for her books.

The business of buying dresses could now be attended to, and the linendraper's shop was immediately visited. Marshall's was a very tolerable shop for a country town, and was shining now in the full glory of the new spring fashions.

Agatha, who wanted nothing, left her sisters to choose their white muslins, and stood near the door, utterly indifferent to the beguilements of the shopman, who was seeking to tempt her with elegant mourning parasols, and a choice assortment of black and white muslins. There was not much to be seen in the market-place of Fairfield at any time; and on this spring evening, it looked remarkably village-like and unbusiness-like. Women, with knitting in their hands, were standing at the doors of their houses, exchanging words with their neighbours; the shops seemed deserted, most of them being left to the superintendence of some idle apprentice, who was either lounging in the background or gossiping in the street, whilst the owners were indulging in a quiet field walk with their wives and children: customers there seemed none, except a few who clustered round the butcher's shop at the corner, and two or three hovering about a vegetable stall held in the open air. A troop of boys and girls were busy flying a kite; and from a quiet street which turned off close by Marshall's shop, came a murmur of

childish voices and the never-ending tap of shuttlecock and battledore. Decidedly Fairfield was bent on pleasure and not business this fine evening. It may be doubted whether Agatha's observation took in all these sights and sounds as she stood at the shop-door, directing her abstracted gaze straight before her. She was accustomed to them, and could not, besides, imagine that anything in Fairfield would ever be interesting to her. She did, however, observe a figure passing along the main road, chiefly because it struck her as being that of a person she had not seen before. He was a young man of more gentlemanly appearance than the generality of the Fairfield loungers possessed in her estimation, and there was something about his air and manner of walking that roused her curiosity. So much so, that she turned to Hester, who was now approaching the door, and said, "Who is that?"

"Oh, that is Mr. Wentworth," returned Hester. "Do you think him good-looking?"

"I don't know. He does not look like a Fairfield person; that is the reason I asked: but I am not much wiser. *Who* is Mr. Wentworth?"

"Surely we told you about him? We met him at Uncle James's last night, and he is coming to our little party on Tuesday. He is staying with Mr. Manners, the Coverdale clergyman, reading or something of the sort. He is at the college of which Mr. Manners was a Fellow. If you want to know

more about him, you must ask Katharine, for she was talking to him more than any one else last night."

But Agatha's curiosity seemed satisfied, and Katharine having now completed her purchases, they all proceeded homewards. The walk was almost a silent one: Katharine and Hester, who would have had plenty to talk about had they been by themselves, felt restrained before Agatha, and she, on her part, rarely introduced a subject of conversation.

It was twilight when they reached their home, which was about a mile and a half from Fairfield by the road, though rather less by the fields: a pleasantly situated house, with large gardens, and a low wooded hill at the back, from which it took its name of Hazel Bank. The house itself was unpretending, but full of substantial comfort, and what newspaper advertisements would call a "suitable residence for a genteel family."

Katharine and Hester, after describing their purchases to their mother, who always sympathized in their little pleasures or difficulties, repaired to a favourite nook of theirs, a dressing-room window overlooking the garden, and shaded at present by the flowery and fragrant branches of a large lilac tree. Here they were able to discuss at will the subjects which were either too trivial or too confidential to be mentioned before Agatha.

She, meanwhile, had retired to her own room

where she remained in solitude until she was summoned to join the family supper, a social meal indulged in by these primitive, early-dining people.

Agatha, alone in her chamber, differed in many respects from the Agatha of the family circle: she cast aside the restrained, stoical expression, which seemed habitual to her features, and gave herself up to the abandonment of sorrow. Not that she wept, or gave any audible demonstrations of grief, but she threw herself on her knees before the window-seat, and buried her face in her hands, and a minute or two afterwards looked up with an expression that any one could have interpreted, it said so plainly—"I am lonely and forsaken, and there is no one who cares for me."

Yes! even in her father's house, with friends and kindred anxious to love her, and to be kind to her, Agatha felt solitary and unknown, and mourned over the desolation of her present life; spending her only happy moments in once more living in the past, and cheating herself into the belief that it was again before her.

Mr. Rivers, the father of Agatha, and now a flourishing solicitor in the town of Fairfield, the possessor of Hazel Bank and sundry acres attached to it, had, when a very young man, and before he was established in his profession, spent several months in a dull little northern town, in the neighbourhood of Greymore Priory, the seat of the ancient family of

Marchmont. As he had good connections, he had obtained the *entrée* into a circle usually closed to the denizens of the town; and, owing to some old recollections which Mr. Marchmont retained of some relatives of whom Mr. Rivers himself scarcely knew anything, he became by degrees a frequent guest at the Priory. It was a sombre, old-fashioned place, and everything about it was conducted with an air of stately formality; but still the younger portion of the family contrived to break through some of the stiffness and pomp which surrounded them, and to render it an agreeable sort of house, in which a young man might lounge away his time pleasantly enough.

The result of all this lounging and intimacy was that Henry Rivers and the youngest Miss Marchmont, the beauty of the family, fell in love with each other. A story might be written about the difficulties which encompassed this attachment: the proud Marchmont indignation, that an attorney's clerk should aspire to one of the daughters of its noble house—for the “good connections” of Henry Rivers no longer availing him, as a suitor for Eleanor Marchmont's hand, he was merely “the attorney's clerk”—the watching, the waiting, the stolen interviews, the vows, the menaces, the tears, and all the crosses which beset the path of true love. It is enough to say here, that after Eleanor Marchmont had nearly spoiled her eyes with crying; after the distant relation who had been the first link between Henry

Rivers and the Marchmonts had interceded; and after Henry himself had become established in his career, Mr. Marchmont gave a reluctant consent to the match, and the fair Eleanor, one of the aristocratic belles of the county, sank down into an attorney's wife in a provincial town, far away from all her early associates. Whether this love-match would have proved a permanently happy one is doubtful, considering the total change of circumstances on one side. Happy it most certainly was during the period of its duration, but the trial was brief. About a year after her marriage, and just after Agatha's birth, Mrs. Rivers died. The child had been named after her mother's favourite sister, the eldest Miss Marchmont, who remained unmarried. She had arrived just in time to close her beloved Eleanor's eyes, and she now insisted on taking the infant away with her. Mr. Rivers, bewildered with his loss and unable to devise any better plan, consented, and thus began Agatha's alienation from her natural home.

Once established at Greymore Priory, it became difficult to remove her: the aunt could not part with her, and the grandfather, spite of his long opposition to her mother's marriage, became strongly attached to her. New hopes, new duties, new claims, too, gathered round Mr. Rivers himself, and prevented his endeavouring so energetically as he might have done to regain possession of his child. Soon

after his wife's death, he removed to Fairfield, and in about two years married again. This time the match was one which few could disapprove; it was in every way equal, and though unattended by any of the romantic circumstances of the former one, it was, on the part of Mr. Rivers, more truly a marriage of affection than even that had been. At the time when he formed his first engagement he was very young, flattered by the notice of one so much above him in the social scale, and proud of triumphing over the many who worshipped in his "ladye love's" train: gratified vanity is readily mistaken for love—easily glides into a feeling which resembles it, until a true absorbing affection rises in the heart, and makes the difference felt. The second love in this case was more pure than the first, and many years of happy married life proved that the choice was a wise one. Poor little Agatha, in her far-away northern home, was almost forgotten amongst the smiling faces which now were thronging round her father's table, and by degrees she became completely adopted into the Marchmont family; even receiving after the death of Mr. Marchmont's last remaining grandson, the name of Marchmont, and being acknowledged the heiress of Greymore. It seemed to be her destiny to be separated from the rest of the family, and to stand in a position widely different from theirs.

But time brought changes which had been little

foreseen, and, at three-and-twenty, Agatha Marchmont was domesticated beneath her father's roof, to take for the first time her rightful place as eldest daughter of the house. Her grandfather was dead, and his affairs were discovered to be in a state very different from what had been expected. He had never been an extravagant man himself, and the embarrassments to which he had subjected himself, to satisfy the needs of a set of wild, reckless sons, had not been generally known : at least not to their full extent. Perhaps he scarcely knew it himself, for he deemed it something almost derogatory to the character of a high-born gentleman, to trouble himself too much about the petty details of pecuniary affairs : neither, though simple to the last degree in his personal habits and tastes, had he esteemed it necessary to alter in any measure the somewhat feudal state which had always been kept up at the Priory. He was a disappointed man ; his children had impoverished him, and sunk into early, unhonoured graves : he survived the last of them, his unmarried daughter Agatha, the only one amongst them who had cast any comfort over his declining years ; and when she, too, was gone, his grandchild was the only remaining tie between him and life.

She was to succeed him ; the ancient Priory was to be hers alone, and many times did he entreat her never to part with it, but to keep it in every respect as unchanged as possible. He never realized the

fact that it would be a profitless inheritance, rather a burdensome responsibility than anything else. Agatha, indeed, would not consider it so, for she was as attached to, and proud of, the Priory as any of the Marchmonts whom she numbered amongst her ancestors could have been, and her dearest wish was to continue to live within its venerable walls, its last solitary possessor. But her father, when he had thoroughly examined her affairs, told her this could not be done. The property was deeply mortgaged, and some of it he advised her to sell outright to assist in clearing the rest, and to this Agatha gave at length a reluctant consent. With regard to the remainder, the Priory itself and the lands immediately adjoining, the best plan was to let the whole, and in time, in the course of long years, perhaps, Mr. Rivers told her, she might hope to possess it clear and unembarrassed, and possibly recover portions of the original estate. The small fortune which had been her mother's remained for her own expenditure, and of this she resolved to lay aside yearly the greater portion, to hasten in some degree the redemption of her beloved Greymore lands.

Once more to return to Greymore Priory, to live in the seat of her ancestors, to fill the post of last representative of the Marchmont line, was the darling dream of Agatha's life, the one hope that made existence sweet to her, and enabled her to forget or to endure the trials and annoyances of her pre-

sent circumstances. It may seem unnatural that a daughter should thus look with something like disgust upon a residence beneath her father's roof, but it must be remembered that all her early associations clustered round another home, and that she had been brought up in the midst of opinions—prejudices, perhaps—which made the sentiments and habits of those amongst whom she was now thrown distasteful and irksome to her.

The cheerful bustle of Hazel Bank jarred upon one accustomed to the dignified stillness and solemn state of Greymore Priory: the young, lively circle, the common interests, the continual chatter, the domestic discussions—how different were all these from the quiet, elderly companionship to which she had been used, the uniform unasked attendance, the silent, distant rooms, where no echoes of common life penetrated!

Agatha felt that she had not sufficient space at Hazel Bank; if she shut herself up in her own chamber, the sound of Katharine's practising disturbed her studies and her reveries; if she wandered into the farthest recesses of the gardens she was not beyond the reach of the children's voices; if she took a solitary ramble in the fields, she met acquaintances, detestable Fairfield neighbours! Here there were no wild, unfrequented moors like those which stretched round Greymore, no sombre, unfrequented pine woods like those which enclosed the Priory

domains: all was smiling, cultivated landscape, an observant peasantry, friendly, inquisitive society, overlooked pathways. There was no solitude; there was no seclusion, no wildness, no grandeur, no gloom!

She felt little congeniality with the other members of the household; there seemed no tie of affection to bind her to these unknown brothers and sisters. Her father was the only person towards whom her heart had really opened, yet with an almost morbid feeling she half endeavoured to close it again. She fancied that he only cared for the love of his younger children, and that any demonstrations of attachment from her, his long absent first-born child, would be unheeded or rejected. That he had married again appeared to her distorted imagination a proof that he had renounced all the memories and associations which should have clung round her mother's name; appeared, in fact, a virtual casting away of herself.

And her stepmother, his second choice! Agatha had come to Hazel Bank strongly prejudiced against her; not that she had the vulgar feeling against a stepmother as such, but she was prejudiced, because she had always been accustomed to consider the present Mrs. Rivers a very inferior sort of person to her own mother. With the pride of family which had been insensibly instilled into the daily lessons of her earliest life, it appeared incre-

dible and inconceivable to Agatha that a farmer's daughter, bearing the plebeian name of Thorpe, could be a worthy successor of her aristocratic Marchmont mother. That there was any distinction between such people as the Thorpes and the small farmers whom she had been in the habit of noticing condescendingly as her grandfather's tenants, Agatha either did not know or did not understand. It had, however, been impossible for her to live three months under the same roof with Mrs. Rivers and retain prejudices against her individually. A sweet, loving temper and a cultivated mind cannot be long misunderstood, and Agatha was not wilfully blind to the excellences of others. Still, though yielding to the gentle influence of her stepmother's disposition, and checking herself in any harsh thought of her, she did not fully understand her, and on many points it seemed doubtful whether the two would ever arrive at any true harmony of feeling.

But the Thorpe family! there was nothing to check her prejudice against its other members, and whatever she might grant to Mrs. Rivers herself, to her connections she would not concede one particle of approach, or relax one iota from her distant, cool, haughty treatment of them. They were people, she said to herself, with whom she had nothing in common; the best plan, therefore, was never to advance towards any intimacy with them, beyond what mere civility demanded. All of them in their several

ways were equally distasteful to her. And there were so many of them ! countless cousins perpetually rising up and coming to pay visits to the members of the family who were settled near Fairfield. The clanishness of the Thorpes was most offensive to Agatha ; she did not ask herself how it would have been had their name been Vavasour or Howard, and the head of the family had resided in a lordly castle, instead of simple, plebeian Meadow Grange.

This last was a substantial, spacious farm-house, well, nay, almost tastefully, furnished, but still, according to Agatha, only a farm-house. It had been the birth-place and early home of Mrs. Rivers, and her eldest brother was now the owner of the house and property. He and his wife were kind, unpretending, practical people, having an only child, Philip Thorpe, of whom more presently. The Grange family, at any rate the father and mother, were scarcely so obnoxious to Agatha as another branch of Thorpes living in Fairfield. Mr. James Thorpe, Mrs. Rivers's youngest brother, many years younger than herself, was a solicitor in partnership with Mr. Rivers. He had married a young wife, who was, in every respect, a contrast to Mrs. Thorpe of the Grange. Vain, supercilious, and worldly, with the manners of a pretty woman spoiled by flattery and conceit, was Mrs. James Thorpe. No wonder that Agatha could not bear her, but still it was hardly fair to lay her individual sins upon the Thorpe

family collectively, to which she did not actually belong.

Not only was Mrs. James Thorpe herself unendurable and an undesirable associate, but she had several sisters who took it in turns to pay her interminable visits; and who were, in Agatha's estimation, equally frivolous and vulgar-minded, and even more silly.

Besides this string of connections, there was an antique Miss Thorpe living at the outskirts of Fairfield, whom the Rivers' girls used to call Cousin Bessy; and a number of stray relatives from more distant parts of the country, who were in the habit of dropping in during their journeys from one place to another, or congregating at the Grange and Hazel Bank when anything unusual, a race, a steeple-chase, or a cattle show, was going on at Fairfield. Mrs. Thorpe of the Grange, too, had a number of nieces, one or other of whom, was frequently staying with her, so that Agatha was not altogether mistaken in considering Fairfield a species of Thorpe colony.

But her own brothers and sisters—at least, one might think she would have found companionship amongst them. It was not so: not one in the rather numerous family harmonized with her tone of mind, and indeed, except Katharine and Hester, none of them were old enough to be exactly companions for her. The third girl, Caroline, was at school in London, and the youngest, Fanny, was a mere

child, Katharine's pupil ; the rest were boys. Henry, the eldest, who was about eighteen, and was in his father's office, fancied himself a man, it is true, but the other two were school-boys ; one at a large public school, the younger living at home and going to school at Fairfield.

Agatha felt little interest in these half brothers and sisters ; their ways were not like her ways, and even with Katharine and Hester, who were well-educated, intelligent girls, she could not bring herself to converse with frankness and sympathy. They were too young for her, she fancied. Katharine, it is true, was nineteen, but Agatha at twenty-three felt very old indeed. She said to herself sometimes that the days of her youth were over ; and it did indeed appear as if the elasticity of spirit and buoyancy of hope attending them had left her for ever.

So Katharine and Hester talked and laughed, and pursued their studies and amusements together, and took their walks and rides, and paid their visits ; whilst Agatha daily withdrew more and more from them, and only rarely intruded her presence upon them, seeming, when she did so, to cast a gloomy shadow across their path.

CHAPTER II.

A WALK TO COUSIN BESSY'S. — NEW
ACQUAINTANCES.

KATHARINE was sitting at work by the favourite dressing-room window the next afternoon. Heaps of white muslin half-buried her in the low window seat, and her active little fingers seemed to fly along the snowy breadths. An open book lay on a table near, but at present Katharine's attention appeared to be concentrated on her work; or rather, perhaps, her mind was as busy weaving its own thoughts as her fingers were hemming her flounces. Many an hour of happy thought had Katharine spent at this same window—many that would be remembered in after years when this dear familiar work would rise before her eyes, among the images of things gone for ever.

It was not a particularly pretty room, but it had the charm of early association, and had been the chosen retreat of Katharine and Hester for years. Though called a dressing-room, it scarcely deserved

the name. It belonged to all the girls alike, and was not attached to any particular room, or used for the actual purpose of dressing. A tall cheval glass, before which the girls paraded when they had new dresses or were going out to parties, and a wardrobe containing their gala costumes, were the only articles in the room at all connected with its designation. The rest of the furniture was simple, old-fashioned, and ill-matched; an amalgamation of things too shabby or too ancient to be placed elsewhere. A very easy arm-chair covered with faded leather, a dark mahogany bureau, black with the polish of a past generation, where Fanny kept her treasures, and in whose deep lower drawer her sisters placed their largest drawings; a small round table, with a raised rim, which creaked if any one leant against it, and some hanging book-shelves painted green, were the most conspicuous articles in the room. But it had a cheery bright look about it; drawings of various degrees of excellence were suspended from the walls by narrow red ribbons, a vase of flowers stood on the round table; and, better than all, through the wide open window, the balmy May breeze was blowing fresh from the perfume of the lilacs, whose blossoms nearly touched Katharine's head where she sat.

Agatha Marchmont was not a frequent visitor to this dressing-room; she generally secluded herself during the hours that the rest of the family

dispersed to their various pursuits, in her own room, which was one of the best and largest in the house, for in some way or other it usually happened that she was treated rather as a visitor than a daughter of the family. This afternoon, however, finding herself in difficulties about some kind of garment she was making for an old woman, one of her *protégées*, for Agatha *did* work sometimes, though chiefly as a matter of self-denial and charity, she repaired to the dressing-room in search of Katharine or Hester, both of whom she fully admitted to be much more clever with their fingers than she was.

Katharine started as Agatha entered, roused perhaps from some pretty day-dream she had been indulging. She was ready, however, in a moment to lend her assistance; and, having smoothed Agatha's present difficulty, and explained her future course, she returned to her own occupation. She had expected that Agatha would leave the room, but she did not do so; she took a chair, and sat down at the other side of the window, and pursued her work in silence. But at last, as Katharine pushed away, with a half-exclamation of satisfaction, one of the apparently interminable lengths of muslin, preparatory to taking up another, she said—

“What are you making, Katharine, with all that muslin?”

“Only the dress I bought yesterday,” answered Katharine, with a smile.

“But you don’t usually make your own dresses, I suppose?”

“Oh, no; only Hester and I are so poor just now, and mamma said she would not pay a dress-maker’s bill for us, but Sarah Jones might come and make our dresses; and we must help her ourselves, or she would not get them done in time.”

“And so you really trouble yourselves to work all day at that muslin hemming, that you may be seen on Tuesday evening in different dresses from those you have been wearing the last few months?”

Katharine slightly coloured.

“You think me silly, Agatha, I know; but really, there is no more hardship in hemming flounces than in working embroidery or crochet, as I should very likely be doing at this moment if I had not my dress to make. Besides, we do not spend the whole day at this kind of work; we did everything as usual this morning, and it is only reading a little less for a few days that makes any difference.”

Agatha made no further remark, and the sisters relapsed into silence. After some time the pattering of Fanny’s little feet was heard on the landing outside, and presently she burst into the room.

“Katharine, mamma says, have you the book that has to go to Mr. Rushton to-night?—because if you have you must finish it in half an hour, for Bob is going into the town.”

“Yes. Tell mamma I will send it down in time,”

answered Katharine, and Fanny departed. "Will you give me that book which is on the table near you?" she continued, turning to Agatha.

Agatha took up the *Review*, and gave it to Katharine, glancing, as she did so, at the open page. It was the middle of a critique or essay upon a metaphysical work, and Agatha had read it herself the day before. She was not exactly surprised, for she knew that Katharine read grave books, but still there was to her mind an incongruity between studying metaphysics and hemming flounces, and she could not imagine the same person taking an absorbing interest in both. She watched Katharine as she read, and admitted that her attention seemed fully engaged. Perhaps she turned the pages rather more rapidly than Agatha would have done, but from the way she occasionally referred to them again, apparently comparing different passages, it was evident that she was reading with thought, and not merely skimming. Before the expiration of the half-hour, she had finished the article, marked with her pencil the back of the book, and carried it down-stairs. When she returned she took up her third flounce, and soon appeared more intent upon the width of the hem than anything else in the world.

"Do you like the article you have just been reading?" asked Agatha, after a few minutes.

"Yes, I like it, but I don't quite agree with it," answered Katharine. "You have read it, I suppose?"

Agatha replied in the affirmative, and then ensued some discussion of the subject. Agatha did not agree with Katharine's notions; nay, some of them rather shocked her prejudices; but she could not help being a little interested nevertheless, and was rather glad that she had introduced a subject which lay beyond the region of small-talk, to which she and her sisters usually confined themselves.

In the midst of a somewhat wild, theoretical doctrine which Katharine was enunciating with great earnestness, Hester entered, exclaiming—

“Oh! Katharine, have you finished those flounces? Sarah Jones wants them, and you must come and see if the body of my dress fits.”

“By and by,” returned Katharine. “You can take these two flounces now, and I will come when I have finished the other.”

“Why, you have not been so quick as usual; I thought they would have been ready.”

“So they would, but for that *Review*; you know I was called away in the midst of it this morning, and I was obliged to finish it just now, as it had to be sent on, but I shall soon be ready. Stay: mind and tell Sarah not to let the flounces hang over each other; she must leave a little space between. What were we saying?” she added, turning to Agatha, as Hester vanished with the flounces.

“I am sure I don't know,” said Agatha, with a smile which was rather contemptuous. “I should

think the current of *your* thoughts must have entirely changed, from the minute directions you have been giving about your dress."

Katharine made no reply; she felt that Agatha was despising her, and though she could have given plenty of good reasons why attention to her wardrobe and appearance was not incompatible with intellectual pursuits, she thought she could not do so without assuming a tone of superiority, which she wished to avoid towards Agatha. Besides, in this particular case, she could not help acknowledging to herself, that she had been a little more eager about the dress for Tuesday evening than was altogether necessary, or free from vanity.

Silently, therefore, she finished her work, and then retired with it, to the distant region where Sarah Jones held her reign over the usual dress-making litter of shreds and patches.

Agatha mused meanwhile upon the inconsistencies of her sister's character; with her own strongly concentrative nature, it was difficult to comprehend how another could take a lively interest in so many and so various things, and she came to the conclusion that with so much versatility, there could be no real earnestness about anything. And the possibility of friendship or sympathy with any but an earnest character did not enter Agatha's mind. No; she did not think that she and Katharine could ever be friends.

Her meditations were interrupted by a summons

to tea. It was brought by little Fanny, who rushed into the room, expecting to find Katharine and Hester, and exclaiming—

“Girls! why don’t you come? Mamma says you are never in the way at tea-time;” but the sight of her grave eldest sister checked Fanny’s importance, and saying, in a tone which was meekness itself—“Oh, Agatha, please, will you come to tea?” she hurried away to seek the others in some different quarter.

Agatha considered Fanny very much spoiled by the rest of the family and not half so deferential towards her elders as she ought to have been, but still the exception made in her own case did not quite please her. She could have been kind, she thought, to Fanny, and even made a sort of pet of her, but she had not the knack of finding her way to Fanny’s heart, and was too much disposed to treat her as a complete child and talk *down* to her; whereas Fanny, a quick little thing of eight or nine years old, had been too much in the habit of associating with her elder sisters, and hearing their conversations, to approve of any such mode of treatment.

Tea at Hazel Bank was rather an important affair, but still it had none of the stiffness of a regular meal. Papa dropped in from his office in the town sometimes during its progress, more frequently he did not arrive till the rest had finished. Willie came in from school, hungry of course, but not always willing to wait till tea was carried into

the drawing-room, but hurrying off to the cricket-field or some favourite haunt, after seizing a cup of milk and abstracting a hunch of bread or a tea-cake from the kitchen. Henry was at the tea-despising stage of existence, but still he occasionally presented himself, bringing with him some friend or other, with whom he was going to have a fishing ramble. The girls, of course, made their appearance with more regularity, though there certainly was some foundation for the assertion of their mother reported by Fanny, that they never were "in the way at tea-time."

Agatha, when she entered the room, found Mrs. Rivers alone, the tea-tray was on the table, but no one behind it, for this was Katharine's post. Presently she appeared, and commenced her tea-making operations with the vivacity which commonly attended her proceedings.

"Those tiresome, engrossing dresses have kept you, I suppose," said Mrs. Rivers, with a smile in reply to Katharine's remark that she did not think it had been so late; "and Hester, too, who is generally the punctual one; really, Kate, you must not make her as bad as yourself."

Hester entered at this moment, to account for her own delay, and was followed by Fanny. A conversation now ensued, in which Agatha took little share; she had not learned to appreciate the trifles which make so much of the charm and comfort of

domestic life, and she could not be interested in hearing that Willie's stockings were wearing out, and that Katharine, who was shopper in ordinary to the family, must buy him some new ones the next time she went to Fairfield, or that Cousin Bessy had not yet seen the last *Illustrated London News*.

"And neither of you has been to see her for several days," added Mrs. Rivers, to Katharine and Hester; "one of you might as well take her the paper this evening."

"May I take it, mamma?" asked Fanny.

"No, child; it is too far for you to go alone; you shall have a little walk with papa and me."

"Hester, will you mind," began Katharine, but Hester already understood her meaning, and said—

"I will go, mamma. Cousin Bessy has a crochet-book of mine, and I want it back again."

"Very well; only if you go alone, you must go early. I don't like your walking after it begins to get dark."

"See!" exclaimed Fanny, who was sitting opposite the window; "papa is coming, and there is cousin Philip with him: we know who Philip comes to see," she added, mischievously, half apart to Katharine, whom she was professing to help with the cups and saucers.

"Hush, you silly child!" said Katharine, in a slightly annoyed tone, and with a blush that was rather angry than pleased.

No one else noticed the child's speech, Agatha probably did not hear it, and Mrs. Rivers pretended not to do so, though a slight smile betrayed that she was not quite unconscious of it. As for Hester she had too intimate an understanding with Katharine, ever to remark upon any words which might annoy her. Meantime the gentlemen had walked through the hall-door, which generally stood open in summer, and their voices were heard outside the drawing-room.

Fanny busily buttered the cold dry toast, which her papa liked, and Katharine began to put sugar and cream in his cup. She was so busy when Philip Thorpe came in, that she could not shake hands. Philip found a seat by Agatha, not, perhaps, the place he would have chosen, for the greeting between the two was of the most distant character. Philip was a Thorpe, objectionable on that score, and objectionable also in his individual capacity. Agatha began to calculate how much longer the tea-things would remain upon the table, in other words, how soon it would be possible for her to make her escape. Mr. Rivers meanwhile was taking the lead in the conversation, the girls were almost silent, and Philip, after his first greetings, seldom spoke. Assuredly Agatha could not lay to his charge the common Thorpe failings—a fondness for talking, an unmeasured eagerness about their own trifling concerns, and an inveterate curiosity about those of

others, but she disliked him nevertheless. He was not frivolous, certainly, but he was uncultivated and unpolished. And yet, to impartial observers, nature had done great things for Philip Thorpe.

A tall, muscular frame, devoid of grace, it is true, but still, with an appearance of careless ease about it which forbade its being thoroughly awkward; a bronzed face, with regular, firmly cut features of somewhat massive type; a brow, far from deficient in intellect, though so shaded by heavy curly black locks, as to be almost lowering; light blue eyes, rather wanting in expression to cursory observers, but capable of sending forth beneath their thick, bushy, yet well-defined brows, those sudden gleams of pleasure, anger, and even fierceness, which seem peculiarly to belong to eyes of that mild and tender colour. All these traits, had they been united with the bearing of a man of the world, or a carefully drilled soldier, would have made Philip Thorpe pass for a remarkably magnificent specimen of a man; but his slouching walk, his indifferent demeanour, and his excessively *country* air, detracted in a great measure from his personal advantages. He had been brought up at home, and his education had only been such as was within daily reach of Meadow Grange; and this, from no parsimony or intended neglect on the part of his parents; but they could not bear to part with an only child; and as for learning, they said to themselves, had not Mr. Hardinge,

the head-master of Fairfield grammar-school, been a wrangler of his year at Cambridge? Of what use to send Philip far away from home to a great public school, when he could get sufficient Latin and Greek at Fairfield to make him a clergyman? What object to go further in search of instruction, when he was to be a farmer like his father and his grandfather before him?

All this was true in itself, but the result of Philip's education was not very satisfactory either to himself or others. His father did not find that he took sufficient interest in farming and country affairs, in spite of his having been constantly kept in the midst of such pursuits; neither did he appear likely to support the Thorpe character in the sporting line. He could neither bring down the birds as his ancestors had done, nor give himself up with their reckless enthusiasm to the hunt, performing the wild feats of horsemanship which were current in the family legends. His mother was a little dissatisfied and disappointed that he was not rather more of a fine gentleman; *not* a lady's man—*that* was a character she professed to abhor—but she would willingly have seen him a little more dashing, a little more talkative, a little more conspicuous in society. It was provoking to see that mere boy, Henry Rivers, offering his arm to stranger ladies, and paying them attentions with more ease and *nonchalance* than Philip displayed even towards his aunt and cousins.

She blamed him sometimes for his shyness, and Philip replied merely by a vague smile. He was not shy, but he would as soon have thought of imitating a mountebank, as Henry Rivers. If his parents were not satisfied with the effect of their system, he was still less so himself. He felt awkward and ignorant: true he had mastered a tolerable quantity of Greek and Latin under Mr. Hardinge's care, but the bent of his mind was not towards classical studies. He knew that he was not stupid; he felt that he might become something much better than he was, but no one had found the key to his intellect, and he groped in the dark for some outlet to the powers he dimly suspected within him.

It is sometimes a misfortune to be what people call "provided for" in the world. Philip Thorpe's lot was marked down before him, and many a struggling student might have envied it; he would succeed to his father's property and employ himself in taking care of it: be, in short, a gentleman farmer, without too much hard work, yet sufficient regular occupation, and in spite of "bad times," lead a prosperous, comfortable life. So thought his acquaintances, and envied him.

Philip thought somewhat differently himself, but he was not in the habit of expressing his thoughts, and he was, besides, too good a son, and too much bound by the family-woven web of domestic care

and love to grieve his parents by a dissatisfaction which seemed likely to lead to no results. So Philip brooded silently, and attended fairs, and talked about crops, and wondered whether it would ever be possible to break his bondage, and emerge into a freer and more active life—a life which would make him feel really to live, and not to vegetate.

Poor Philip Thorpe! another web, too, was binding him now, making him at times forget his struggles against the earlier one. If only Katharine Rivers would look kindly on him and his love, he could have almost forgotten that any world existed outside Meadow Grange, and have been content to spend his energies on turnips and “short horns.”

But this is a long digression, and by this time tea must be over. As Fanny rang the bell, Hester rose from the table, saying it was time to start on her walk. Katharine rose hastily at the same moment, and followed her out of the room.

“You going too, Katharine!” exclaimed Mrs. Rivers. “I thought Hester was going alone.”

“I think I may as well walk with her,” said Katharine, and vanished. Philip looked wistfully after her, and then turned his attention to the window, from which he could see the girls the moment they left the house, and perhaps make a bold stroke to follow them. He was undisturbed in his watching, for Agatha had disappeared, and Mr. and Mrs. Rivers were talking to each other, but Philip Thorpe

might wait till midnight without seeing the two light figures he expected move down the garden walk.

“Let us go out by the school-room door,” said Katharine to Hester, as they were putting on their bonnets. “We can cross the green lane into the fields.”

“Yes,” said Hester; “but I don’t think it is any shorter than going round by the gate.”

“No, perhaps not,” returned Katharine, “but Philip Thorpe might take it into his head to accompany us, and it is much pleasanter by ourselves; don’t you think so?”

“Of course it is,” said Hester quietly, half smiling, as she pulled out the bows of her bonnet strings.

Through the school-room, across the corner of the grass-plot, past the end of the yard, and into the green lane—these movements were rapidly accomplished, and the girls were soon walking in the fields where we first met them. They did not talk much this evening; Katharine was thinking more seriously than she generally did of her cousin Philip and his attachment. She knew he liked her, though he had never expressly told her so: but it seemed to be an almost understood thing in the family, and her young companions constantly teased her about his devotion. She had been rather gratified at being so teased; it flattered her self-love, and Katharine was not free from vanity.

She liked to be praised and admired, and Philip’s silent appreciation of her merits and her attractions

had hitherto been rather a source of pleasure than annoyance to her, but now she began to view it in a graver light, and to wonder where it was to end. Some time or other, she supposed, she must put a stop to Philip's pretensions, and Katharine, with all her faults, was not a heartless coquette, to delight in wounding the feelings of another. She foresaw, too, if that day came, a host of difficulties to be encountered: Philip was a favourite with her father and mother, and she knew her uncle and aunt Thorpe would never forgive her for paining him. As for *loving* him, that possibility did not enter Katharine's head; he did not suit her in any respect, and she was puzzled to account for the fact of his liking her, there seemed so little in common between them. Her conscience rather smote her for looks and words which, in a moment of elated vanity, she might have bestowed upon Philip, and on which he might have built unfounded hopes; still, upon the whole, she could not greatly blame herself for her actions: her demeanour had generally been entirely cousinly, and of late rather cold than otherwise. But Philip's unspoken love hung about her like a dead weight, and she would have given much to shake it off at once and for ever. As they approached the town and cousin Bessy's house, she roused herself from her abstraction, and began talking to Hester, recollecting, in sudden alarm, the newspaper they were to have brought with them.

“I have the paper,” answered Hester, laughing, and showing it. “You know it was my business, not yours; you did not intend coming at first.”

“True, I had forgotten,” returned Katharine, the image of Philip Thorpe, with his moody brows, as she had quitted the room, flashing across her remembrance. They had now reached cousin Bessy’s door; the house, a small cottage-looking place, stood at the outskirts of the town, divided from the high-road leading to the street by a narrow slip of garden enclosed by a green paling. At the other side of the road stretched the meadows which led to Hazel Bank.

After their usual warning tap at the door, the girls entered the house, and walked through the narrow and somewhat dark passage to the parlour. No cousin Bessy was there, but they were certain she could not be far distant, or the chain at the door, her usual precaution against visionary vagabonds and ruffians, would have barred their entrance.

If a room may be taken as an index of the owner’s character, cousin Bessy’s must have been of a very mixed description; and a stranger would perhaps have been rather puzzled to form an idea of her, from the arrangement of her furniture and knick-knacks. One thing was certain, an old-maidish preciseness could not be laid to her charge. There was indeed no decided want of order visible, but a glance at the open work-basket, with its medley of

contents, unfinished bits of work, old letters, stray keys, half-used unrolled skeins of silk and wool, scraps of flannel, partially-mended stockings, &c., would have sufficed to show, that no painful and oppressive degree of tidiness existed in cousin Bessy's personal economy.

The room itself was of tolerable size, nearly square, with a bow-window, which afforded from one of its sides a perfect view of the doings of the street, which commenced just beyond the house. Two or three flower-pots graced the window seat, and a canary sang in the middle, the cage being suspended immediately over the flowers. In cousin Bessy's mind there was a good deal of romance connected with her bird and her flower-pots, and she felt almost young in the morning when she attended to them. The furniture was plain, but dark and bright, like all old mahogany that has been tolerably cared for, and there was one state easy-chair, covered with gay chintz and a smart antimacassar, which cousin Bessy reserved for her choicest friends. Her own customary seat was a rather uncomfortable-looking chair, which stood between the work-table and the window.

The carpet was somewhat faded, but bore traces of having at one time exhibited a brilliant collection of flowers, and devices of remarkable shapes and colours. It was evidently still prized, as in many parts it was covered with a drugget, much newer and brighter

than the carpet itself. Before the fire-place, lay a worked hearth-rug, an old-fashioned, worsted-work production, with a formal pattern of cubes and diamonds, in which a tawny brown was the predominant colour. This hearth-rug was Katharine's aversion, and she had once made a rash promise to work another if it were removed; but cousin Bessy was faithful to early attachments, and would not part with it; and when Katharine had gained some insight into the story of the rug, had heard of a party of sisters working together long years ago in a favourite secret retreat, some shabby old attic where no one interfered with their girlish labours and girlish talk, she learnt to look with a more favourable eye upon the tawny brown, the faded yellows, and the dingy greens.

There were specimens of more modern handiwork among the knick-knacks of the room; various kinds of mats, upon which rested strange shells and bits of stone, valuable only from association; a vase of fresh wax-flowers standing amidst antique lavender baskets and card-board boxes; and one or two water-colour drawings, bright and unfaded, suspended from the wall amidst brown-tinted, yellow-margined engravings of older date. Above the chimney-piece hung a print of Sir Robert Peel, who had at one time been cousin Bessy's ideal of a statesman, she being, in her peculiar way, something of a politician; and though the picture had been placed there

before the time when he became, in agricultural parlance, "a traitor to his cause," and cousin Bessy had since heard him inveighed against by her Protectionist friends, she had been faithful to her old predilection, and to her principles of "men, not measures," and had refused to displace him. Another picture, also a favourite of hers, hung opposite the window, and represented the Queen with the Prince of Wales in her arms, and the Princess Royal by her side. In this picture her faith was unbounded, and she even fancied the Queen's likeness was true, from her remembrance of her as she had seen her when Princess Victoria at the age of fourteen; allowing, of course, as she said, for the lapse of time.

The chimney-piece was further decorated with a pair of wonderful card-racks, resembling ladders, formed of bits of pasteboard bound with ribbon, and disclosing to view sundry envelopes, thus making public the most of Miss Elizabeth Thorpe's correspondence. A few visiting cards were stuck in at intervals, some of them of no very modern date; for cards were seldom left at cousin Bessy's, and were therefore treated with great respect and consideration.

Katharine and Hester had seen all the contents of this room too frequently to notice those which have just been described, and they employed themselves alternately in looking out of the window,

and examining what progress cousin Bessy had made in the piece of crochet she was working from Hester's book.

They did not wait long before she entered the room, giving a little start of surprise and pleasure at seeing them.

"Oh, my dears! and I have been keeping you waiting all this time, what a pity! I wonder Phœbe did not hear you come in; I was just looking at the currant-trees. Jacob Jackson has been gardening for me to-day, and the trees are all nailed up and tidy now. But come, sit down and tell me all the news."

And cousin Bessy seated herself as she spoke on her accustomed chair, with its straight back and horsehair cushion, and the girls sat down on the little couch opposite.

Miss Elizabeth Thorpe was what is generally called "a lady of a certain age;" which age was, however, in her case very uncertain, for her friends declared she had looked just the same for twenty years, and as she had at no period of her life looked very young, it seemed probable that at no period would she look very old. In "point of fact" she was between fifty and sixty, but in point of feeling and temperament, she might have been six-and-twenty; nay, a girl of sixteen could scarcely in some respects have exceeded her in freshness and eagerness.

This youthfulness of disposition of course made

her a favourite among the junior members of her acquaintance; her own contemporaries scarcely appreciated her so much, and there were not a few to whom her eagerness was folly, and her interest in youthful pursuits, affectation. Want of judgment, too, was a frequent charge brought against her, and "Poor Bessy! she means well, but she knows nothing of the world!" was a speech often made by her sage compeers.

Little recked cousin Bessy of the one charge or the other. Had she heard them, indeed, she would indignantly have refuted them, without the remotest suspicion that there was any truth in them. She was rather proud than otherwise of knowing the world, and fond of telling her young friends that *they did not* know it; but somehow it usually happened that they smiled, and refused to believe her wiser than themselves. She was fond of a little romance in her way, and deeply interested in love affairs and mysteries. Perhaps her feelings were fresher in this respect, from having had little personal experience. No one would imagine from looking at cousin Bessy that she was a subject for a romantic story, and yet it was not impossible that she might have woven, out of slight materials, a history for herself; all the more fascinating, from the mystery surrounding it remaining unbroken, and never arriving at the actual *denoûment* of common life. In appearance, cousin Bessy was rather

tall, thin, and angular; a face plain, but bright with intelligence, and a pair of dark little twinkling eyes, that could laugh or weep on the shortest notice. She was rather smart in her dress, and made an attempt at being fashionable, though not trying any very absurd juvenilities. Her attire was no more old-maidish than her work-basket; indeed, she scorned extreme precision as not consistent with good taste; a favourite phrase of hers being, "The more careless, the more genteel."

"And so you are very gay just now," commenced cousin Bessy, after receiving satisfactory reports of the health of the family. "I heard of your party at Mrs. James's the other night; she asked me to drink tea yesterday, and I heard all about it. Miss Arabella Grover was so tired with dancing she could scarcely speak."

"I never knew dancing tired people's tongues," said Katharine.

"No; but you know, tired altogether, so that she was good for nothing."

"It was only a quiet party after all," said Katharine; "and we had very little dancing."

"Ah! we all know what a racket *she* is, don't we, Hester?" said cousin Bessy.

"Oh, but really Kate is right this time," said Hester; "I am sure Arabella's fatigue must have been a little imaginary."

"She seemed rather out of love with parties, my

dear ; and talked of wasting life in crowded rooms, and the pure pleasures of the country."

Katharine laughed.

"Oh, I know Arabella so well ! She must have been vexed about something, or she would not have talked in that way. And Lucy—was she in the dumps too ?"

"No, indeed ; Lucy was lively enough, and she told me a little tale about you, miss : flirting again with the first new person that comes."

"Nay," said Katharine, "I am sure she could tell you nothing particular about me. I behaved most properly, and did not dance above twice with the same person all the evening."

"Ah ! but who offered to play so many quadrilles and polkas?—and who sat behind the piano and talked all the time ? Poor Philip ! I wonder what he thought of it !"

"I don't see what Philip has to do with the matter," said Katharine, rather hastily ; "and really, cousin Bessy, I did not think you would listen to Lucy Grover's silly stories. According to her, and some others, one cannot speak to a gentleman without all sorts of things being fancied."

"See how she is firing up about it, Hester !" said cousin Bessy, mischievously.

"No, I am not angry," said Katharine ; "only it vexes me to see how all this kind of thing spoils society. Who can converse with any freedom if a

report is immediately raised, and everything set down to flirtation? Fortunately for me, I forget these disagreeable remarks when I go into society again, and I defy Lucy and all of them to spoil my pleasure."

"Oh, Katharine!" said Hester, "you forget how often you tease people yourself, and on very slight grounds, I am sure."

"But I only tease stupid young men, who cannot talk about anything, and they like it, and it does no harm; it is quite different to making remarks behind a person's back."

"Well," said cousin Bessy, "let us talk about something else. I suppose now we have done with that nonsense, you don't mind telling me what Mr. Wentworth is like. I heard a great deal in his praise from Miss Grover, but not so much from Mrs. James."

"Oh! he is gentlemanly and agreeable, and a great improvement upon our usual run of gentlemen."

"And, Hester, what do you think of him?"

"Why, I hardly spoke to him; but he is good-looking, I think, and rather satirical, I should fancy; at least, I know I should feel afraid of talking with him: but what did Lucy say?"

"She said he was a fascinating person, and had the most wonderful eyes in the world; and Miss Arabella said he was interesting, and looked like a person who had a secret sorrow."

“What rubbish!” exclaimed Katharine, and Hester laughed; “but what did Sophia think?”

“Oh! Mrs. James said Lucy and Arabella were silly to talk in that flighty manner, and there she was right enough; and then she said something about preferring people who were solid, which made me fancy she thought this gentleman frivolous and light; and she said you could never depend upon strangers, ‘here to-day and gone to-morrow’ sort of people. And Mr. Wentworth was quite a ball-room man, ready to make himself agreeable to any girl who encouraged him, the newer the better; and she hoped *her* sisters knew better than to be caught by such flimsy——”

“Upon my word!” interrupted Katharine; “Sophia seems to have made good use of her time, and he is just the kind of person who would have caught her fancy if only he had——Poor Mr. Wentworth! he little knows how people sit in judgment upon him!”

“He does not seem a person to care much if he did know,” said Hester, quietly; “besides, the good opinions of some people might counterbalance the bad ones of others. But, cousin Bessy, I was nearly forgetting, have you finished with that crochet-book of mine? If you can let me have it for a few days you shall have it back again. Aunt Thorpe wants me to make her some doyleys, and the patterns are in that book. She is rather in a hurry, or I would not have asked you.”

“Oh, my dear, pray take it! The truth is, I don’t exactly get on with that last pattern, and I think I shall give it up. Lucy Grover is going to teach me to make some new antimacassars, so I shall not do any more crochet just at present.”

“Well, then,” said Katharine, “now you have settled that, it is time for us to go, I think. Mamma does not like us to be out late.”

“Surely, you are not going yet! I have scarcely had a word with you, and I want to hear about your gaiety.”

“What gaiety?” asked Katharine, laughing. “It seems to me you have heard everything at uncle James’s.”

“I mean the gaiety that is to come, my love—your party at home.”

“Oh, it will not be much of a party; we shall dance a little, and have as much music as we can muster.”

“And you are to have Mr. Manners and Mr. Wentworth?”

“Yes; you know we always ask Mr. Manners, though he is not much use at a party.”

“And will Miss Marchmont make her appearance, and make herself agreeable, I wonder!”

“Really, cousin Bessy, I wish you would call her Agatha; don’t make her seem to belong to us even less than——”

“My dear, I never can think of her as anything

but Miss Marchmont, and I feel as if it would be a liberty to call her Agatha. I know, of course, you consider her as a sister, and it is very pretty of you, I am sure, to take to her so much, but really I cannot get on with her. I pitied her very much at first, and of course it is very sad for her; but still, with a nice home, and friends about her, I think she ought to exert herself a little, and not look dismal enough to frighten one. But you have not told me, does she mean to show herself on Tuesday?"

"I have not heard her mention it," said Katharine.

"But I know mamma expects her to appear," added Hester.

"And so she ought, my love. To be sure, at first, one could not expect her to enter into any amusement or company, but by this time she ought to mix with her family and friends, and not shut herself up in such a way. I assure you, my dears, it looks bad in the eyes of the world, indeed it does: I hear things sometimes, and I know what people are ready to say in such cases."

"I dare say you do," returned Katharine; "but I do not see that any one is to blame. Agatha, naturally, cannot care for us at present; all her feelings are wrapped up in the friends she has lost. We seem like strangers to her, but by and by, it will be different, I hope, and in the meantime we can understand and make allowances, and the remarks other people choose to make need not affect us."

“Very pretty, my dear, and very right. I am sure all that kindness can do will be done by all of you; but if I were your mother, I should try a little of a different plan. I should *insist* upon Miss Marchmont appearing more like other people, and before the world, at least, seeming to belong to you, and not secluding herself, or wandering about the country like a ghost, or a mourner in a play. But your mother is too gentle and easy! I know she would not think of interfering.”

“I dare say mamma will speak to Agatha now,” said Hester, “if she continues her unsociable ways. So far she has not said anything. Even the other night, when we had only aunt Sophia and the Grovers at tea, and Agatha would not come in, she did not try to persuade her, but she said afterwards that she thought it was time for Agatha to remember that other people had some claim upon her.”

“And now, really, good-bye,” said Katharine, rising for the second time, and after a little detention during the hand-shaking and a short stoppage at the garden-gate, whither cousin Bessy accompanied them to point out some early rosebuds, the girls were suffered to depart.

Half-way across the fields, they encountered Mr. Manners and Mr. Wentworth going home to Coverdale. It seemed natural for all to walk on together, though Hazel Bank was rather out of the direct road to Coverdale. Katharine apparently was right in

saying that such remarks as cousin Bessy had been repeating did not affect her, for she talked away unconcernedly to Mr. Wentworth, pursuing a subject they had commenced, and not been able to finish, the other night.

Hester and Mr. Manners were comparatively silent, for Hester was shy, and Mr. Manners, not much accustomed to talk to girls. They laughed, however, from time to time at the *badinage* which was going on between the other two; that half-earnest joking, which seems to help to form an intimacy sooner than anything else, and in which so many traits of character are half unconsciously, half playfully, revealed. In the midst of the laughing and talking, and just as they had surmounted the difficulties of a barbarous and primitive stile, Philip Thorpe's tall, powerful figure appeared at the opposite end of the field. Katharine, whose foot was on the lowest ledge of the stile, and who was laughingly refusing Mr. Wentworth's aid, was the first to see her cousin; she did not speak, but the little start she gave caused Mr. Wentworth to turn round and follow the direction of her eyes. Hester also now saw Philip, and said—

“I suppose mamma has sent Philip to look for us, thinking us late,” but Katharine made no remark.

In another minute they had met him. He gave but slight greeting to the gentleman, then turned to

his cousins, and said something which the others did not hear.

“It is not so very late, surely?” said Katharine, in answer and with an air of slight annoyance. “We often walk alone much later; however, we shall soon be at home now.”

“As you are now so well guarded,” said Mr. Wentworth, with the slightest shadow of something—was it amusement, or sarcasm?—in his voice, “I think it would be desirable for us to seek our own home. I know enough of the geography of the country to be aware that we are not taking the shortest way to Coverdale; eh, Manners, we should turn across those fields, should we not?”

“Yes,” answered Mr. Manners, rather dreamily, “yes, certainly; we must say good evening,” and after shaking hands the two parties separated. The remaining fields which led to Hazel Bank were silently traversed. Philip seemed to have nothing to say, and the girls did not attempt to lead him into conversation. As they reached the gate, and Hester, who was rather in advance, had passed through, he said to Katharine—

“I shall not go in; your mother will be satisfied when she sees you are safe.”

“I do not see there was any occasion for her to be uneasy,” said Katharine.

“She was though,” said Philip, “or I should not have come to seek you. I know you did not want

me. What made you so careful that I should not see you leave the house? Were you so very much afraid I should intrude upon you?"

"Really, Philip, there is no end gained by this kind of questioning, and Hester and I are accustomed simply to consider our own pleasure and convenience as to the way we leave the house."

"Good night," Philip said in a moody tone, as he held the gate open.

"Good night, Philip," returned Katharine, briskly, holding out her hand to him: but he was busy fastening the gate, and when he had finished it, he walked away without looking up.

Katharine turned towards the house, and ran in, and then quickly joined Hester up-stairs.

But neither of them spoke of Philip Thorpe that night.

CHAPTER III.

THE UNDERWOOD.

FANNY'S school-room was a pleasant little retreat, without any of the bare desolation of aspect which usually attends the domain of lesson-books, desks, and rulers. It opened upon a little side-plot of garden, green and shady, with a narrow strip sacred to Fanny's gardening; and on the steps leading to it, Katharine's flower-pots flourished.

Inside there was a degree of taste in the arrangements, which seemed to indicate that it was not used merely for the purpose of hearing and saying lessons. It was not so, in fact; for Katharine had a girlish pleasure in converting the little study into something like a boudoir, and many were the contrivances to which she had resorted to give an air of elegance to its homely, commonplace contents. Agatha might perhaps sneer at some of them, but they had a meaning and a beauty to Katharine's eye, and the common round table, with its handsome braided cover, its various trifling ornaments of her own manufacture, its vase, ordinary in material, but elegant in

shape, satisfied her sense of refinement and beauty more than many a costly article might have done for which she had taken neither thought nor trouble. Fanny's desk and bookshelves were at one end of the room and near the window, but at the other end, where the glass door opened into the garden, Katharine's table and drawing easel stood, and two or three chairs with gay antimacassars were ranged around. The bit of drugget was bright and fresh. The muslin curtains which shaded the door fell in light graceful folds, and altogether there was a holiday appearance about this place of study.

At this end of the room, with the green blind partly drawn to keep out the afternoon sun, Katharine and her pupil were sitting; Fanny was reading aloud, not a dry lesson-book, but some entertaining historical memoir which was reserved as a treat for the afternoon reading. Katharine was engaged with some light fancy-work, though not to the detriment of Fanny's studies, for she stopped her most conscientiously from time to time to inquire a date, or describe the situation of a place.

Suddenly the passage door opened, and their mother's voice was heard :

“Katharine, have you any idea where Agatha is to be found?”

“I believe she went out for a long walk directly after dinner, mamma.”

“And did she say nothing to any of you about

to-night? Surely she cannot intend to appear, or she never would take a long walk to tire herself at this time of day."

"I don't think she would mind much about being tired, mamma," said Katharine, "but I really do not know what she intends to do. Neither Hester nor I spoke to her about coming into the room to-night, for we thought you intended to tell her that she ought."

"So I did intend," said Mrs. Rivers, irresolutely; "I was going to tell her just now, but she is not in her room."

"I am afraid she has never thought about it," said Katharine. "I believe it is a thing she will hate; you know she cannot bear company."

"But it appears so odd for her never to join us," said Mrs. Rivers. "Of course, I could not urge her, at first; her recent loss was a sufficient excuse; but really our acquaintances must expect to see her with us now, and it makes her seem scarcely to belong to us."

"I can tell you where Agatha is," interrupted Fanny; "she won't be back till past tea-time, for she has gone to take Goody Brown that flannel petticoat she has been making for her, and she is sure to stay a long time reading to her."

"Goody Brown's!" repeated Mrs. Rivers. "Why, that is the other side of Underwood! What could make her think of walking there this afternoon?"

“To get out of the way, I suspect,” said Katharine, in a low voice; then, turning to Fanny, she added, “Are you quite sure, Fanny? How do you know about Agatha?”

“Because I heard her talking to Hannah just before dinner. You know Hannah’s mother lives at this side of Underwood, and Agatha asked Hannah if there was any way of going right through the wood to Goody Brown’s, instead of round the edge of it; and Hannah said if she would call at her mother’s one of her little sisters would show her the way, but it was a long scrambling walk, she said. And Agatha said she did not mind that, and she asked if Hannah wanted to send any message to her mother; and Hannah told me she wanted to ask her to tell her mother to send for that old blue frock of mine you gave her, mamma, for little Nelly, but she did not like, Miss Marchmont always looked so grand. If it had been Miss ——no, I won’t tell you what she said, Katharine.”

“Well, never mind that,” said Katharine, “you have told us quite enough; but I wonder you did not mention this before.”

“I was going to tell you before I began my reading,” said Fanny. “Don’t you remember I said I believed that Agatha did not mean to be at the party to-night, and you and Hester stopped me, and said I was not to meddle with Agatha’s intentions?”

Mrs. Rivers smiled.

“You should have begun with the facts, Fanny, instead of giving your own conclusions and opinions, and then you would have been listened to. However, it is no use thinking of it now. I do not suppose Agatha can be back in time to dress before tea,” and Mrs. Rivers left the room as she spoke.

Katharine turned to her sister—

“You can read to the end of the chapter by yourself, Fanny; I am going out. And, remember, I shall ask you to-morrow what it is about. Afterwards you can stay here and work till Hester wants you to help her with the flowers.”

Fanny looked surprised, but she said nothing, and sat down in the window with her book. Katharine quickly vanished, and sought her mother in the dining-room.

“What have you come for, Kate?” asked Mrs. Rivers, in some surprise.

“Why, mamma, I think you are rather vexed that Agatha has gone so far, and I am going to walk to overtake her, if you like.”

“My dear child, you don’t like walking in the sun, I know, and you will be tiring yourself. Oh, never mind Agatha. It is foolish in me, I dare say, to mind what people think.”

“Oh, I understand exactly, mamma, and I feel quite annoyed about it myself.”

“I do not mind telling you, Katharine,” said Mrs.

Rivers, "that I have a silly dread of being called a 'stepmother,' and considered to make a difference between Agatha and my own children."

"My dear mamma! you a 'stepmother!'" exclaimed Katharine, laughing: "I am not at all afraid any one will say that. Agatha will receive all the blame; but, in any case, it is not pleasant, and I think she ought to show herself amongst us now, so I shall just put on my bonnet and rush after her as fast as I can."

"But you cannot possibly overtake her. Consider how long she has been gone."

"Yes: but she will be sure to stay some time at Hannah's mother's, for I know she always reads to the paralytic old grandmother when she goes there; and I can walk quite as fast, if not faster, than she can, besides knowing all the short cuts."

"But the sun is so hot, and it always makes your head ache."

"Not May sun, mamma, only July sun," called out Katharine, half-way up-stairs.

In another moment she was in the hall again, having hastily tied on a garden hat, and thrown a light shawl round her shoulders. Mrs. Rivers watched her through the garden door and across the lane, calling her a dear good girl as she did so. The words just reached Katharine's ears, and gave her renewed energy for her hot walk. It was quite true that she did not like walking in the sun, and on

this particular afternoon she was more than usually reluctant to be disturbed in her home pursuits, but her sympathy with her mother was always very strong, and in the present instance, her own feelings were also interested in making Agatha appear truly a member of the family. Yet she could not help feeling a slight irritation against her, for thus withdrawing herself from all social fellowship, and though she had volunteered her present tiresome walk, she could not avoid being a little angry with Agatha as the cause of it.

Katharine had planned a very different afternoon for herself: she had intended to gather fresh flowers, and to put the finishing touches to the arrangements of the drawing-room. She was anxious to make this party "go off well," as it is called, and she wanted everybody and everything to look as nice as possible, herself included. Katharine, as has been said, was not free from vanity, and she liked to have time to dress carefully, and to go down into the drawing-room, looking fresh, cool, and lady-like. Now she would be tired, hot, and hurried, and all her plans of inspection and arrangement must be laid aside. Perhaps it was foolish to care for such trifles, perhaps it was strange that Katharine, who had experienced so many of these small home parties since she left school, should care so much for this, or have misgivings about the invariably neat and tasteful appearance of the drawing-room, and the effect

of her own dress. But to those who live in a quiet, monotonous circle, where a new face is rarely seen, the presence of a stranger, whether man or woman, is an excitement, and rouses in some natures a desire to put forth all their powers of pleasing. It was so with Katharine, she had an undefined wish that her home, as well as her individual self, should make a favourable impression upon Mr. Wentworth, the new-comer, who appeared to her on many points so far superior to her usual associates. Perhaps this was not a very dignified feeling, or one at all resembling the calm complacency which, in such a case, the heroine of a story should display: undoubtedly, too, it was tinged with vanity, but yet much that was amiable was mingled with it, and an extreme eagerness to please and be approved is, perhaps, less censurable than the dignity of indifference.

The irritation which Katharine felt on considering the disarrangement of her plans did not last long: she resolutely cast it aside as soon as she became conscious of it, and tried, as she had often done before, to throw herself into Agatha's situation, and to understand the state of her mind. It was difficult to do so fully, where the natural dispositions were so different. Katharine could warmly sympathize with Agatha's grief: she could believe it to be intense, and she could imagine that after the loss of such dearly loved relatives, the world would seem blank

and dreary to her ; but she could not understand her withdrawal from all the ties of affection that yet remained to her ; her proud, reserved rejection of all the love which so many hearts were ready to lavish upon her. Her affliction might indeed make her sad, and even for a time almost despairing of any earthly happiness, but why should it make her also gloomy and morose ?

Katharine tried to take into consideration the other changes in Agatha's circumstances, but she could not entirely appreciate them. She knew that Agatha was not worldly : the loss, therefore, of Greymore, as a luxurious home, could not in itself affect her ; and Katharine was not aware of the strength of early associations, and the internal rooting of opinions and prejudices in minds that, like Agatha's, have more depth than breadth. She could not understand that because Greymore had been a happy home, no other home could be happy—that no other scenery could be charming—no other society endurable. She could not understand a sorrow which found no mitigation in present enjoyments, or a disposition in which there seemed no spring of elasticity.

Katharine herself was of a cheerful, almost joyous temperament, although her spirits never rose much above the even flow which best suits the intercourse of daily life : she had a facility for making herself contented and happy in new situations, and had she

been in Agatha's place, so many fresh sources of pleasure would have opened around her, that the old griefs, though not forgotten, would have been gently healed. Her range of enjoyments was wider than Agatha's, and nature, art, music, and poetry spoke to her with tongues of gladness, where to Agatha they only whispered mournful longing and decay.

Even on this afternoon, as she walked along, a sense of buoyancy and freedom soon raised her above her little annoyances: the brilliant sunshine, the vivid green of the trees, the summer hum of insects, the quivering of the early butterflies over the opening wild flowers, and above all the deep clear blue of the sky, filled her heart with joy and thankfulness. To Katharine, as yet, in spite of minor trials, the world was very fair and lovely. It remained to be proved whether the spring of her happiness was pure enough to stand the test of outward sorrows, and changing circumstances.

Her rapid steps, and acquaintance with the "short cuts," soon brought her to the border of the Underwood, and the cottage of Hannah's mother. The Underwood was not exactly what its name implied, though it might at one time have deserved the appellation; but at present there were many trees almost lofty enough to grace a forest, and in some instances the proper underwood was entirely cleared away, leaving small open glades, the favourite haunts of gipsies and vagrants. Still these cleared spaces were

“few and far between,” and it was somewhat difficult to trace the narrow paths which penetrated the masses of brushwood. Just on the outskirts of the wood, in a little hollow at the end of a hilly, uneven lane, which led up to the village of Coverdale, stood the cottage of Hannah’s mother ; and as Katharine approached it, with its dark background of wood, the chequered sunlight falling on the narrow strip of green sward in front, and the shadow of the tall hawthorn bushes reflected in the cool clear water of the deep pool at the bottom of the lane, it formed a sufficiently picturesque object. The sight, through the open door, of a woman bending over a washing-tub, did not detract from the charm, to an eye accustomed to find beauty in homeliness ; and the geese cackling near the pond, and the little girl digging up potatoes in the square plot of garden, only added to the rustic character of the scene.

“Hannah’s mother” was a widow who managed to gain a tolerable livelihood as a washerwoman ; some of her children, like Hannah, were “out in the world ;” the younger ones, together with her bed-ridden old mother, she contrived to keep respectably at home.

Katharine was no stranger at the cottage. There was no such fine-washer or clear-starcher in the neighbourhood as Hannah’s mother, and many a choice piece of lace, or delicate muslin dress, had Katharine trusted to her hands. Having visited the cottage on business, she had been led to do so

for pleasure, or to give some little gratification to its inmates, for though she did not pursue, like Agatha, a systematic rule of charity, her kindliness and tact could often find occasions of doing those trifling impromptu services which are prized by the poor.

No sooner did Hannah's mother, or, to call her by her proper name, Mrs. Watson, see Katharine, than she ceased her labours, and wringing the soap-suds from her hands, advanced to meet her.

"To think of seeing you just now, Miss Rivers, and your sister—Miss Marchmont, that is—only gone these five minutes."

"Only five minutes! then I shall overtake her. Which way did she go, Mrs. Watson?"

"Why, if you are seeking her, Miss, you'd better take our Nelly to show you the road, for she knows the way her sister was leading Miss Marchmont, and there's a many paths in them woods; it's like seeking a needle in a haystack. Here, Nell, come and show Miss Rivers the way. Run and wash your hands first, child, and be sharp."

"It is a pity to take both the children from their work," said Katharine; "if you could only point out the path, I don't think I should lose my way in Underwood. I am particularly anxious to overtake my sister."

"Oh! Nelly can guide you straight enough, Miss Katharine, if you'll only wait a minute, and you'll

soon overtake them, for Miss Marchmont is not such a fast walker as you."

"Was she here long?" asked Katharine.

"Why, she talked a bit to our old woman there, and just read her a chapter, and when Nancy had cleaned herself they set off. She said she wanted to find a path that led right through the wood, that she might go by herself another time; she tried one day to get to Goody Brown's cottage, and she came out, instead, just by the Cruxley turnpike. And are you going to see Goody Brown too, Miss Katharine?"

"Not to-day," said Katharine, "and I want to stop my sister; we are both wanted at home this evening, and I fancy she has not calculated how long the walk will take her. But is not Nelly ready?"

"Nell, Nell, be quick," called out her mother, not unwilling, however, to prolong her gossip. "Poor old Goody Brown, Miss, she needs friends to help her, she's growing very feeble, and it's a lone desolate place that other side of Underwood."

"There are the cottages, surely, at Cruxley!" said Katharine.

"Ay, but they are a good bit from old Goody's, and they are a queer set at Cruxley, Miss Rivers, a lot of poaching ragamuffins; if you'll believe me, they care no more for Mr. Manners when he goes amongst them than they would for me—oh! here's Nelly at last!"

And Katharine seized upon the pause her appearance caused, and departed as quickly as possible.

Through tangled and overgrown paths into the thickest of the wood, she followed her little guide, thinking, as she did so, that even Agatha's love of seclusion must be satisfied here. It was the wildest spot in the neighbourhood; indeed the whole Cruxley district was the most rugged and uncivilized in the county. All the poachers and vagabonds who disturbed the rural tranquillity of Fairfield, had their head-quarters in the Cruxley hamlet, and the Underwood, from its vicinity to such a lawless race, was rather shunned as a place for solitary walks. But considerations of this kind were not likely to have much weight with Agatha, and at the present moment they scarcely occurred to Katharine. Little Nelly was too well acquainted with the woods to be frightened in the day time, though she had some awful stories to tell of depredations committed by gipsies, and of mysterious noises heard in the wood at night.

After walking some time as fast as the nature of the ground admitted, Agatha appeared in sight. There was no mistaking the tall dark figure slowly moving forward, with a certain determined air, which seemed to indicate a total disregard of all surrounding objects. Nancy was walking timidly a few paces in advance, evidently afraid of ventur-

ing upon any observations in Miss Marchmont's stately presence.

A few moments brought Katharine to her sister's side. Agatha turned sharply round at the sound of her voice, but her manner showed no surprise.

"I did not know that this was a favourite walk of yours," she said.

"It is not," said Katharine, a little confused, now she had attained her object of overtaking Agatha, and puzzled how to begin explaining the purpose of her walk. "I came," she continued, after a pause to recover her breath, for she had been running the latter part of the way—"I came to ask you to go home with me, Agatha."

"But why?" said Agatha. "I have not finished my walk."

"I will explain," answered Katharine, "if you will turn round with me and walk homewards; and let us send these children away."

"The children can go," said Agatha, "and I will turn round with you, but I am not at all sure that I shall relinquish my intended walk."

Katharine in a few words dismissed the children, desiring them to tell their mother that they were no longer needed, and also that if one of them would go to Hazel Bank the next day, Hannah had something to send home.

Nelly and Nancy ran off homewards, and Agatha

and Katharine proceeded more deliberately along the same path.

“And now will you explain this mystery, Katharine?” said Agatha.

“There is no mystery,” said Katharine. “The matter is simply this: we have some friends coming to spend the evening with us, and mamma naturally wishes all of us to be at home. If you walk all the way to Goody Brown’s, you will be either too late or too tired to appear: so I have come to beg you to return with me.”

A faint flush became visible through the waxy paleness of Agatha’s skin, and her voice slightly trembled as she replied—

“So far I have been allowed to believe that I might indulge my grief in solitude, and not be dragged into society which is quite uncongenial to me. Surely, one who is situated as I am may be exempt from frivolous gaiety!”

“It is not gaiety,” said Katharine, flushing a little indignantly in her turn. “No one would dream of asking you to go to a ball, or join in anything that could really be called gay. But a social little evening party is a very different thing, and I cannot see anything in it to hurt your feelings, or be considered inconsistent.”

“And you will have dancing and music, and so forth?”

“Music, of course; and probably a little dancing,

but quite in a quiet impromptu style, and you need not remain in the room longer than you wish. It is only your *appearing* with us and being one of us, that papa and mamma care about."

"Papa!" repeated Agatha. "Does my father really wish me to do what you have been saying? I thought it was only an idea of your own and your mother's."

"Papa wishes everything that mamma does," said Katharine, with a little return of the angry flush. "Indeed, I have heard papa say how glad he would be, if you were rather more cheerful, and would enter a little more into our ways."

"I did not know he cared," said Agatha, after a short pause. "Well! as it is the general opinion, I yield. I shall sit in the drawing-room to-night, Katharine, but I do not suppose my presence will add much to the mirth of your party."

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed Katharine. "I am so glad you will come; and indeed, Agatha, you should not talk as if your absence or presence made no difference to any one: if you would only believe that we like to have you amongst us."

"Even if you do, I doubt whether my society is at all congenial to your friends," said Agatha, something like a smile stealing across her features. "But that is not much consequence; you understand so well the art of making yourself agreeable, that my exertions may be spared."

“Don’t be satirical, please, Agatha,” said Katharine.

“I mean what I say; I consider you act the part of daughter of the house to perfection, and I have no doubt you are extremely popular.”

“I am not the eldest daughter, I know,” said Katharine, in a rather wounded tone, for there was a covert taunt in Agatha’s speech, which she was much too quick and sensitive not to perceive. “But, Agatha, the moment you show yourself inclined to take your proper place, you may be sure that I shall retire to mine. I have always been at home, you know, and people may sometimes have forgotten that I am not the eldest.”

“Indeed I have no wish to interfere with you,” said Agatha. “My ambition is not in that direction, and I am sure I could not fill the post if I tried.”

Katharine made no reply; her attempts to arrive at a better understanding with Agatha seemed fruitless; and she feared that a few more remarks of the same nature would prove too much for her temper. Agatha might not intend to sneer, but Katharine, though not generally prone to take offence, felt keenly the tone of superiority which she used.

They walked silently along as the afternoon sun slowly declined; it was a long, weary walk, and Katharine grew hot and impatient, as she thought

of the near approach of the hour at which the guests were expected to assemble at Hazel Bank. Agatha seemed to have lost all thought of the matter, and she walked leisurely forward, unburdened by the fears of a hurried toilette and a late entrance, which were oppressing Katharine.

At length she was struck by the increased speed of Katharine's walking, and she suddenly remembered that the party which would be to her a weariness and a grievous bore, might not be so to her companion, and that the hasty walk in search of her might have caused some inconvenience. Why, after all, had Katharine given herself any trouble on the subject? Agatha felt that it could not be from any ardent wish for her society; it must have proceeded from a pure desire to further her mother's wishes, and to give an appearance of unity and harmony to the family party. The motive was an amiable one, and the walk under a burning sun, when Katharine had, as she knew, abundant occupation at home, was an effort of self-denial. As such she could appreciate it, though she might deem it uncalled for; and her conscience smote her a little for her unsympathizing, uninterested manner, which had, perhaps, rendered this duty more irksome than was necessary. She strove to throw aside a little of her reserve, and to begin a conversation which might beguile the time.

The declining sun and the gorgeous western clouds

furnished her with an opening; the beauty of cloud scenery still remained to her, though all else around her might not satisfy her taste, and in praise of sunsets, and recollections of some she had witnessed at distant places, Agatha became almost eloquent.

The subject led naturally to pictures, and Agatha had seen and studied them in far-off galleries, which Katharine had only visited in her day-dreams. The conversation was interesting, though their views of art did not coincide; a listener might have been curiously struck by the differences of character which their opinions disclosed, even on the most trifling points. A turn of drapery, the waving of a bough which Agatha would describe as a defect, would perhaps by Katharine be considered a beauty, and she would hazard some rash conjecture about the hidden meaning of the artist's mind, to which Agatha would listen incredulously, though scarcely so contemptuously as usual. Altogether the end of the walk was better than the beginning, and when they reached the shady lane at the side of the house, Katharine was surprised to find herself so near home.

"We must make haste in dressing," she said, as they crossed the yard and garden, to the school-room door.

"I always dress quickly," observed Agatha, relapsing into her ordinary manner; "but I am afraid I have shortened the time for your toilette."

“It is no matter,” said Katharine, “only I do believe some people are here already;” and she pointed to some hats which had been placed in the schoolroom, which, on occasions like this, served as a sort of retiring-room, and also as a receptacle for sundry articles which would be required during the evening. The trays of glasses and plates, and the dishes of fruit and cake, which had displaced Katharine’s knick-knacks on the round table, indicated that this was a company night.

Agatha had already gone up-stairs, and Katharine only lingered a moment for the chance of seeing a servant who might tell her what guests had actually arrived. No one, however, was visible, so she repaired to her own room.

At the door she was met by Fanny with the exclamation—

“Oh, Katharine, here you are at last! How late you are! You must be very quick.”

“Where is Hester?” asked Katharine, rapidly throwing off her shawl.

“Oh, she went down-stairs long ago: she told me to stay here to dress you, for Hannah and all of them are busy. Oh, how red your face is! and you have all your hair to do, and some people are here already.”

“My dear child, you are not going the way to make me cool and composed; just get me my hair brushes, and tell me who are here.”

“Only Aunt Sophia and the Grovers,” answered Fanny, as she tried to make herself useful.

“But surely I saw some hats in the school-room.”

“Oh, those two Elsley boys,” returned Miss Fanny, with a contemptuous little shrug; “they always come before any one, but you need not mind being late for them. See, Kitty darling, how nice your dress looks; Hester and I fastened on the bows, that it might be quite ready; you only just have to slip it on, and you will be quite dressed, and I think you are getting cool.”

“I see; you have been very thoughtful, but, Fanny, I have no time to talk. Only tell me—you put the flowers in the vases, I hope?”

“Oh, yes, they are beautiful! And what do you think? we turned all the dusty old cards out of the basket, and put in a little tiny, shallow saucer, and filled it with lovely little flowers and green sprays hanging all over the edges, and it looks so pretty, you cannot think. It was my invention, and Hester thought it rather silly at first, but I was sure you would like it.”

“Yes, I dare say, I shall; but I want some more hairpins.”

Fanny produced them, continuing her running commentary till Katharine was ready “to be fastened,” when she had to mount upon a chair, and bend all her energies to the task. It was satisfactorily accom-

plished, however, and then Katharine, after giving a kiss to her little attendant, descended the stairs, followed by the expression of admiration which Fanny always lavishly bestowed upon her sisters, when they assumed a more gala style of costume than usual.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EVENING PARTY.

KATHARINE'S first glance round the drawing-room satisfied her that Agatha was already there, and almost at the same moment she met her mother's eye, and read her expression of relief and gratification.

As she was half-laughingly making excuses to the Grovers and other guests for her delay, the door opened, and Mr. Manners and Mr. Wentworth were announced.

Katharine broke off her conversation with Lucy Grover to shake hands with them; and Mr. Wentworth, after looking hastily round the room, drew a chair near a couch where she and Lucy were sitting.

"Only think, Mr. Wentworth," exclaimed the latter, who was of a confidential disposition, "Katharine Rivers has been walking nearly to Cruxley, this afternoon. I am sure she ought to be tired. I cannot think why you went so far, Katharine, to make yourself hot. Why, you will not be cool again all the night."

"I am tolerably cool already," returned Katharine.

"I am sure you look hot; does not she, Mr. Wentworth?"

"Really, Lucy, I think you might find something else to talk about," said Katharine. "Don't you know, nothing makes one so hot as personal observations?"

"I have walked from Coverdale, Miss Grover," said Mr. Wentworth. "Is that a long enough walk to call forth your compassion?"

"Oh, gentlemen are different," said Lucy; "and indeed, Mr. Wentworth, I don't object to long walks, only I wondered Katharine should choose such a walk this afternoon. I am a very good walker, I assure you; at home, I always walk before breakfast, but here I have no one to walk with, for Arabella says it tires her, and Sophia hates walking. You have no idea, Katharine, of the walks Eliza Hammond and I take before breakfast at Marston."

"I should not think there were many pretty walks about Marston," observed Katharine.

"Oh, I don't know. We go very often down Plowden Lane to the railway bridge, you know, and we watch to see the mail train pass under it. I assure you, it is a very nice walk. Were you ever at Marston, Mr. Wentworth?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"You must have passed it, though, in the railway;

I don't think Katharine likes Marston, but you were there at a dull time, Katharine; when we have the races, there is plenty of fun; indeed, at all times we have more society than you have at Fairfield. I often say so to Sophia, when we sit all through the morning and no one comes to call. At Marston we always have some one dropping in, and we go in and out to the Hammonds just as we like. You should hear Eliza Hammond sing, Mr. Wentworth; she has such a powerful voice; and I heard a gentleman say that she sang 'The Maniac,' and 'The Gambler's Wife,' better than Russell."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Wentworth; "they are rather odd songs for a young lady, are they not?"

"Oh, they suit Eliza; and she sings with so much expression! I declare I could cry sometimes over the last verses of the 'Gambler's Wife:' you need not smile, Katharine; you did not hear Eliza when she was in good voice; besides, I remember the piano was out of tune."

Katharine was not smiling at that moment; on the contrary, she was looking rather grave, for she had just caught a satirical expression on Agatha's face, which seemed to indicate that this highly intellectual and entertaining conversation, or rather monologue, had reached her ears. She knew that Agatha thought Lucy Grover silly, and she had already experienced how prone she was to judge

the whole from a part, and she felt certain that this specimen of the chit-chat of the evening would disgust her with Fairfield parties altogether. Why had Agatha placed herself near this particular sofa? Why had she not chosen a position where she would have been likely to hear more sensible conversation? Why had she not joined in some herself, instead of sitting so provokingly silent, yet so evidently alive to what was going on?

Katharine looked round the room in despair, but she did not see many indications of the intellectual discussions that Agatha would have approved. Perhaps Lucy's simplicity might be better than Sophia's worldliness or Arabella's affectation, and the chatter of a party of young girls who were teasing the "Elsley boys," would certainly not have been more to her taste. Katharine fell into a brief reverie, wondering that she herself had hitherto borne so patiently with the defects of the Fairfield circle; why even Lucy's talk had at times amused and interested her. Indeed, now that Agatha's contempt had made her more aware of the shortcomings of country-town society, she yet felt that she could have enjoyed the evening very much had no thought of Agatha come across her.

The truth might be that Katharine was herself popular, that she could talk amusingly, and that she generally had sufficient tact to draw other people out upon subjects in which they excelled. Strong

love of approbation might have something to do with it; she was always anxious to make a favourable impression, and the consciousness that she succeeded in this spread a sort of *couleur de rose* upon all around her. After all, perhaps, it is more what we give than what we receive which makes society pleasant or otherwise to us.

It was a relief when music was proposed, and Lucy Grover moved towards the piano, ceasing her conversation with Mr. Wentworth. A general breaking up of sets took place, and the usual amount of indifferent music and singing was gone through. Katharine and Hester were the only tolerable performers; Arabella Grover had rather a good voice, but her execution was doubtful and her taste of the worst kind. Lucy strummed polkas which might serve well enough for dancing to, but were not charming as specimens of music; and the only others of the party who played, Dr. Selby's young daughters, performed in school-girl fashion, and were nervous, too, at playing "before people."

Katharine and Hester had just finished a duet, when Agatha, who was sitting by one of the windows, was addressed by an oldish young lady who had joined her there. This was Miss Penrose, the only unmarried daughter of the Fairfield clergyman; a kind-hearted, unpretending person, not very clever, and not very much the reverse; in short, an everyday, commonplace character, useful in her place,

and liked by those who knew her. Agatha had not seen her many times, and had not formed any opinion about her; only she had a general impression that there was nothing in common between herself and Miss Penrose in tastes, principles, or feelings. She was almost surprised at hearing herself spoken to.

“Don’t you sing, Miss Marchmont? I think it is your turn now.”

“I do not sing,” answered Agatha.

“Then will you play something?”

“I do not play either,” was the reply.

“Dear! how odd! when your sisters are so musical. I thought you would be sure to play, at any rate. Are you certain you really do not play sometimes?”

“Never,” returned Agatha; “I have not touched a piano for seven years.”

“But you learnt music, I suppose?”

“Every one does, I believe,” said Agatha, in a tone meant to express that the subject was ended so far as she was concerned.

But Miss Penrose was not satisfied.

“It seems strange when your sisters are so fond of music! To be sure, tastes do not always go through a family; my two married sisters used to play beautifully, and Emily sang a little, but I never could manage even the bass of a duet myself. But I love to hear music dearly.”

"I did not say I was not fond of music," said Agatha.

"Oh, then you are like me," said Miss Penrose, eagerly, "you are fond of it, though you cannot—though you don't play, I mean. Was not that a pretty duet your sisters sang just now?"

"Yes, it was pretty," said Agatha, carelessly.

"Perhaps you don't like that style: what music do you prefer?"

"Oratorios and chants, and Haydn's and Beethoven's symphonies," said Agatha, checking herself hastily. It seemed nonsense to explain her tastes to Miss Penrose.

"Oh, of course, that is the grand style; I like oratorios very much myself. I was to have gone to the Birmingham festival last year, but one of my sisters was ill, and I had to stay with her. But you know one must have something else for every day, one cannot always be listening to oratorios. But see, some one is going to sing: oh! it is Mr. Wentworth; I did not know he sang; your sister Katharine (how nice she looks to-night!) is going to play the accompaniment: no, I declare, he is going to play it himself. How funny!"

"Hush!" said Agatha, rather authoritatively, for the first chords had struck upon her ear, and struck upon her memory also. They formed the opening of a German song, one of the few modern ones which satisfied her requirements of music. The low, wild.

chords were over, and then the voice burst forth, or rather stole upon the ear, at first sad and restrained, but gradually swelling out, till the clear rich notes of a tenor voice of remarkable beauty arrested the attention even of those who had thought little of the unpromising introduction. Agatha shut her eyes to listen, and sat drinking in the sounds in complete abstraction. She had heard nothing like this singing for months; nay, she had never heard the song in question as she heard it now. Voice, modulation, expression, all were perfect; even the few notes of accompaniment were played as only one gifted with true musical feeling could have played them; and Agatha felt that Mr. Wentworth had done right in choosing to play for himself. Katharine, unacquainted with his style of singing, might have spoilt the whole affair.

Agatha did not hear the remarks of Miss Penrose when the song was ended; she did not observe the buzz of admiration that filled the room; even the entreaties of Lucy Grover that Mr. Wentworth would sing again did not jar upon her. She had enjoyed a treat she little expected, and her imagination and her memory had led her far away, far from Hazel Bank and Fairfield society. When she turned her attention to present things, she became aware that preparations for dancing had commenced, and that she was in danger of being jammed up in a corner by a table which Philip Thorpe was offici-

ously wheeling along, in obedience to a hint from Katharine that he was to make himself useful. An exclamation from Miss Penrose enlightened him, and Agatha at the same time, as to his awkwardness, and with a not less awkward apology, he made room for her to pass, before he pushed the table to its final destination.

Agatha moved away to a vacant ottoman, and looked round the room, her curiosity being excited to take a closer survey of Mr. Wentworth, than she had hitherto cared to do. She had indeed noticed him the other evening as he walked across Fairfield market-place, but to-night she had scarcely remarked him, till his wonderful singing had so powerfully attracted her. Now, she was anxious to see how far his appearance and manner corresponded with the impression that she would have formed of him from merely hearing his voice. It was rare for Agatha to be interested about any one, but in the present case, she certainly *was* interested.

Interested, however, only to be disappointed the next moment. Laughing and talking nonsense with Katharine and the Grovers, the pathetic singer was standing by the piano, no trace in his lively movements and mirthful eyes of the deep feeling that had characterized his song, and that had seemed to bespeak an earnest, thoughtful nature.

Unreasonable as it was, Agatha instantly lowered the estimate she had made of him. Not the lightest,

most thoughtless of those laughing, dancing, jesting girls she despised so much, was more the sport of sudden impressions and hasty judgments than was the grave, serious, seemingly "strong-minded" Agatha Marchmont!

At length the merry dispute, for such it appeared, at the piano, was settled, and Lucy Grover thumped away at those noisy old Irish quadrilles which to Agatha's ear sounded so hideous; and Katharine and Mr. Wentworth took their places in the dance.

A polka succeeded, and then came other quadrilles and polkas, and faint attempts at waltzes, with girls dancing together, to make up for the idleness of non-dancing gentlemen.

Intervals there were of sauntering in the passage, or strolling forth through the open garden door into the tempting evening air; wandering over the cool grass and growing sentimental under the lilac and seringa trees of the shrubbery.

No one disturbed Agatha: it was generally understood that she did not dance, and her air did not invite any of the shy youths who were not occupied in dancing or flirtation to enter into conversation with her. Miss Penrose, after a few attempts, had left her for more congenial society, and the rest of the girls were fully engaged with their own pleasures. From her quiet corner, Agatha watched their proceedings, feeling very superior and very old. What

a wide gulf there appeared between these young girls and herself!

She moved towards the window where she had been so nearly imprisoned by the table, and found a space left where she could stand and see what passed in the garden, for though the room was lighted, the windows were unshuttered. There was no fear of being overlooked so far from the road.

Somewhat abstractedly Agatha glanced at the forms flitting along the garden walks, and at the group standing on the steps. One couple, a little apart from the rest, presently attracted her attention. The white dress and black sash, so readily distinguished in the summer twilight, showed one of her sisters, and the gentleman's figure was plainly that of Mr. Wentworth. Intuitively Agatha felt that Katharine, not Hester, was his companion.

They were talking with animation, already, as it seemed, advanced to some degree of intimacy: they passed the window where Agatha was standing, and turned down a side-walk. She heard a few light words, and then Mr. Wentworth's low, amused laugh, which she had already noticed as peculiar. Involuntarily her eyes followed their movements, rather than those of any others of the party; and she wondered what they could find to talk about so eagerly on so short an acquaintance. Perhaps had she heard the conversation she would have wondered still more that subjects, in themselves so trivial, could become

so interesting. In reality, the talk between the two was commonplace enough, but do we not all know that under the veil of daily small-talk, many characteristic traits may come to light, and that persons of congenial minds will readily find in the most simple and trifling remarks the clue to each others' tastes and feelings? From the first moment that Katharine had exchanged words with Mr. Wentworth, she had been conscious that she might express to him her opinions and fancies without fear of being misunderstood; conscious also that he was a very different person from the generality of the young men it had been her lot to encounter. Not that Katharine was given to despising her associates; on the contrary, she was easily pleased with people at first; each new acquaintance was approved for a time, though usually a few meetings broke the spell: it might be so with Mr. Wentworth also; he might not stand the test of closer knowledge.

Katharine had not escaped the imputation of being a flirt, though nothing could be further removed from her real character. That is to say, she could not have carried on a regular system of flirtation had she tried, and yet her conduct, it must be confessed, occasionally laid her open to the charge brought against her. The case was simply this: she was an intelligent, animated girl, living in a rather dull neighbourhood, and her every-day acquaintances, though her social temperament prevented her

avoiding or depreciating them, did not fully reach the ideal she had formed of agreeable society : a stranger, therefore, entering the circle was hailed by her with joy ; he or she might prove a delightful exception to the common run of her associates. Thus, she was always eager to discover the ideas and tastes of the new arrival ; and if the individual happened to be of her own sex, she was merely considered to be making herself agreeable and properly courteous. But—it may as well be confessed at once—Katharine's curiosity was generally more lively when a gentleman and not a lady was concerned : she had, as some clever, agreeable girls seem to have, more facility in conversation with the former than the latter ; possibly, too, the advances on the gentleman's side were greater. However, it might be, it generally followed that when a young man arrived in the neighbourhood, he and Katharine became very friendly during the first few meetings ; that is to say, unless he chanced to be silly or stupid ; afterwards the intimacy died away in a gradual manner, and Katharine confessed to herself that her new companion did not surpass the old ones.

She was not a flirt, but still this habit might gradually, as her love of admiration increased, and her fastidiousness lessened, have led her to become one. Katharine certainly had great love of admiration, and it is well known that this passion grows with what it feeds on, and that its cravings extend

at last for the approval of those who were at first almost despised.

But Katharine and her latest acquaintance are still walking in the garden; they have been talking of various things, glancing at topics too deep for hasty discussion, then returning to the every-day subjects of new waltzes and London exhibitions.

At length Katharine declares she must go into the house; people will be wishing for another dance, and it is her business to play polkas for them.

“And by the way, I think it would be a good thing, Mr. Wentworth, if you were to play in your turn. I had no idea that you played, or I would not have offered to accompany you.”

“You have heard the extent of my playing, I can only manage an accompaniment.”

“But if you can play accompaniments, you can certainly play polkas. It is so seldom one sees a gentleman sit down to the piano; a friend of mine though told me of one who plays magnificent pieces, and practises most difficult duets with his sister or cousin, I forget which.”

“Cousin, I should imagine. I dare say he finds it a fascinating occupation, but my ambition does not soar so high. I merely play accompaniments because I cannot sing without music, and I do not always meet with a lady who is willing to play my songs. I do not think the piano an instrument for a man; he

always looks absurd and clumsy. It belongs peculiarly to a lady, in my opinion."

"And yet, how splendidly some men play! You would not do away with the Liszts and the Thalbergs, I presume?"

"Oh! I was not speaking of *professional* performers. That is quite another matter. I grant them all the praise you desire, perhaps more, for I do not think any woman *can* play as a man may do. But then these are people who devote their life to it; there is nothing ridiculous about *their* playing; it is their business, or, if you like it better, their *mission*. I was only speaking of amateurs; I don't think a man ought to play unless he can do it *thoroughly* well; and to do this he must spend more time about it than is justifiable."

"But many people—ladies, I mean—play nicely and pleasingly without any great amount of practice!"

"Yes; and a lady playing 'Valse Brillantes' or 'Nocturnes' *pleasingly*, is a pleasing and graceful object, but a man playing *pleasingly*!—I am sure you see the absurdity of the thing."

Katharine laughed. "I don't know exactly why it should be so; it seems to me, you would not do anything unless you were quite sure of excelling in it."

"Indeed, you mistake me," replied Mr. Wentworth, eagerly, "I would try to do my best in any-

thing within my own sphere, whether I were likely to succeed or not. Certainly I would not step out of it to attempt what I might not be able to manage."

"You sing; is singing within your sphere?"

"You are laughing at me now, and perhaps I deserve it, for I have not explained my meaning clearly. But I will tell you, if you like, why I sing. I am quite aware that I have a good voice, and I have some knowledge of music. Very tolerable singing is more generally liked than even superior instrumental music. I find my singing gives pleasure, so I always sing when I am asked."

"I don't believe you reason in that way every time you sing a song. No; you know you can sing well, and you like people to admire you."

Mr. Wentworth shook his head, and laughed his peculiar low laugh, and at this moment they entered the drawing-room.

Katharine went up to the piano, and began directly to play a polka; Mr. Wentworth interrupted her.

"I thought you were going to dance with me, this time; let me ask Miss Grover to play."

"No," answered Katharine; "I really must play now; it is quite my turn."

"Introduce me then to your sister—Miss Marchmont" he added, seeing Katharine look surprised.

"Certainly, but she does not dance."

“I know that; but it is not necessary for me to dance every time, is it?”

Agatha had left the window, and was now sitting at a little distance from the piano, listlessly turning over some books that were on a table near her. She looked up in some surprise when Katharine and Mr. Wentworth approached, and bowed at the introduction in her usual stiff manner. But Mr. Wentworth seemed determined to enter into conversation, for he sat down, and took up some of the books by way of finding a subject.

“You appear to have a pretty good set of periodicals for a country place,” he commenced.

“They belong to the book club,” said Agatha, shortly.

“But how is it you have so many at once? surely that is against all rules?”

“My sister Katharine is a sort of manager, I believe, and she sends out the magazines, and they all return here; but, really, I don’t know much about them.”

“You don’t patronize such light literature, I suppose?”

“I do not call the whole of these exactly light,” said Agatha, pointing to some reviews and standard magazines; “but I do not agree with the views taken by any one of them, and I think they are all conducted in a spirit likely to do more harm than good.”

“But that is a very sweeping condemnation: surely some of them advocate a cause you can approve. What do you say to *Blackwood's*, or *Fraser's*?”

“*Fraser's* I never read,” said Agatha, with decision; “and *Blackwood's* has so deteriorated that I am annoyed whenever I read an article.”

“You are a staunch Conservative in theory, I fancy.”

“I do not know that I am anything in particular,” said Agatha; “but I most strongly disapprove the levelling, irreverent spirit of the age, which most of these periodicals express.”

“The spirit of the age!” repeated Mr. Wentworth, rather absently. “What is it in reality? I wonder what will be said of it when we are all gone? Will these ever be looked upon as ‘good old’ times?”

“Never, I should imagine, unless the world goes on from bad to worse, which is, indeed, likely enough.”

“What, then, is your idea of the spirit of the age?”

“It is a money-getting, money-loving spirit,” said Agatha, with more warmth than usual; “an age where reverence for antiquity is at an end, where there is no more honest dependence of one class upon another, but where each is striving against the other, and the deepest cunning and most callous disposi-

tion gain the day"—she stopped suddenly, annoyed at finding herself expressing sentiments which she generally chose to keep locked up within her own breast.

"I can feel the truth of part of what you say," said Mr. Wentworth, earnestly, and with a sudden transition from his playful smile to a grave, almost sad, look, as if her words had struck some painful chord of his memory. "The love of money does indeed form part of the spirit of the age, but I would hope there are some noble counteracting influences. You are right; the lower faculties of the intellect gain success, and the higher wither away in fruitless hopes—

"What is it that I should turn to, lighting upon days like these. Every door is barred with gold, and opens but to golden keys.

"Those lines are true, though Tennyson wrote them," observed Agatha.

"Though! why though?"

"Tennyson is no favourite of mine," said Agatha, listlessly, as if she did not care to pursue the subject.

"I might have guessed it; he is too modern to suit you: is it not so?"

"I do not dislike him merely for being modern, though I own I have a very slight opinion of modern poetry. Indeed what poets have we who deserve the name?"

“I cannot pretend to answer you: everything depends upon our different definitions of a poet; yours and mine would be strangely opposite, I fancy. Still we should agree, I think, in requiring earnestness, and there is more earnestness in many modern poets I could mention, than in some whose names have become classical. I was going to mention, not a poet, but a poetess, as an instance, Elizabeth Barrett Browning; but I have an intuitive conviction that you closed her volume of poems as you did *Fraser's Magazine*.”

“Why do you conclude so rapidly what I like and dislike?” asked Agatha, half vexed that any one should penetrate her reserve, and presume to guess her thoughts, and yet half pleased that any one should appear to understand her. It was a new sensation; most people were deterred by her unsympathizing manner from trying to guess her tastes.

“It is not difficult when one has perceived the bias of a mind to carry out the idea into details,” said Mr. Wentworth.

“But what can I have said to give you a clue to my tastes?” said Agatha, her reserve for the moment overmastered by curiosity. “I am sure I have expressed very few opinions to you, none to lead you to judge what kind of poetry I like. My saying that Tennyson was no favourite of mine could scarcely guide you, for many people dislike him, though, probably, for different reasons.”

“You said a few words at the beginning of our conversation, which gave me a little insight into your general views. Besides, I pretend to some skill in physiognomy, and the connection between voice and character ; altogether, enough to convince me that you are a very *consistent* person, and that one decided opinion of yours being known, it is easy to imagine the rest : they all correspond.”

“Consistent,” repeated Agatha, thoughtfully ; “I wonder whether I am : I think I have been told the reverse.”

“Consistent was not the exact word perhaps ; I meant rather that a single idea pervaded and influenced your whole character.”

“You two people seem to be having an argument,” interrupted Mrs. James Thorpe, coming up at this moment. The sound of her dry, high-pitched, jerky voice recalled Agatha to her habitual stiffness and dignity ; she was angry with herself for having so far relaxed during the last few minutes ; angry with Mr. Wentworth for having interested her by what she now considered impertinence. She left him to reply to Mrs. James Thorpe, scarcely noticing the skilful way in which he parried the question, and presently she made her escape to another part of the room.

She did not speak again to Mr. Wentworth during the evening ; indeed, she managed to pass the time without much interruption or disturbance from any

one: it was evident to everybody that Miss Marchmont was not of a sociable disposition; and even the most pertinacious and the most good-natured wearied in time of making advances to which there was no response. She was, however, more interested in observing the proceedings of others than she had at first expected to be: She could not but own that there was something to admire, and something to like in the behaviour of her sisters: neither the bright animation of Katharine's manner, nor the gentle kindness of Hester's, could be classed under the sweeping epithets frivolous and vulgar, which she chose to apply to the Fairfield society in general. They might laugh and talk about things which could never have interested her; but candour obliged her to acknowledge that there was more amiability than folly in their compliance with the ways of others. She could not help watching them as they sat at supper; Katharine absorbed one moment in an earnest conversation with Mr. Wentworth, then turning to pull cracker bon-bons, and exchange flippancies with some very different guest. Hester, attempting to "draw out" one of the young Elsley boys, with shy good-nature, but looking much happier when she was herself drawn out by some older visitor, for Hester, like many young, timid, yet thoughtful girls, was much more at her ease with middle-aged or elderly men than with those who were nearer her own age. They talked more sensibly, and required less of her,

and understood much better what she left unsaid. No one could accuse Hester, like Katharine, of being a flirt; she was indeed more admired in the matter of beauty than her sister, but it was chiefly by men old enough to be her father, who patronized but never attempted to flirt with her. Younger men liked Katharine because they could "get on," as it is called, with her, and occasionally were incredulous to the praises of Hester's brighter complexion and fairer features.

Some comparisons between the two occurred to Agatha this evening; and though she did not entirely approve all she saw, yet she felt something more like the glow of sisterly affection towards them than she had done before. A little curiosity mingled with her other feelings, as she witnessed the prolonged and ever-interesting discussions of Katharine and Mr. Wentworth. Did Katharine always become so easily intimate?—and did Mr. Wentworth favour her with speculative opinions upon her character?—or was that an impertinence reserved for herself alone? Katharine looked as if she found nothing to blame in what he said; but that might proceed from her gratified girlish vanity, her satisfaction at being singled out by the handsomest, the most distinguished looking man in the room.

Handsome! that was another of Agatha's sweeping assertions; taking the two faces, feature by feature, Philip Thorpe's was incomparably hand-

somer than the stranger's, but then Mr. Wentworth had a charm which, in spite of his impertinence, Agatha was not slow to acknowledge: he had the style of face she was accustomed to call aristocratic. The long, thin nose, the well-cut eyelids, half-dreamily falling over the clear, dark, gray eyes, so languid in their repose, so penetrating and vivid in their sudden flashes of animation, the small, delicately formed lips, which, compressed into a thread-like line, were capable of giving such stern determination to a face, whose ordinary expression might have been thought too effeminate and undecided. The brow, fair as a woman's, yet marked with a man's thoughts, and free from any insipid smoothness, and above all the nameless grace of figure and movement, combined to form a whole which most persons would have termed refined, intellectual, striking, but to which Agatha gave her highest praise in bestowing upon it the magic epithet—aristocratic. It was wonderful commendation for her to grant to any one met in such a circle; but her admiration scarcely extended beyond the exterior, and she had not much desire to increase her knowledge of Mr. Wentworth, except for the sake of his singing. The way he had spoken to her, though interesting at the time, was annoying in the retrospect. So the evening passed away, and Agatha retired at last from a scene where she had felt merely a spectator, exchanging hasty good-nights with her sisters on the staircase, and

all unheeding the faint murmur of talk which accompanied their steps as they passed on to their room, and which continued until the recital of their mutual impressions of the evening's events gave place by degrees to their dreams.

CHAPTER V.

A DAY AT THE GRANGE.

Two or three evenings after the party, in the calm still twilight, Katharine and Hester were walking up and down the garden path, under the lilac trees. Many were the subjects the girls used to discuss during these twilight walks, some of which would perhaps have been considered by the "lords of creation," beyond their grasp and ken, but which they enjoyed notwithstanding; and so far it did not appear that their abstract questionings and musings had unfitted them for their practical duties. At present, however, they were occupied with a perfectly legitimate and feminine subject—the critical consideration of their sister Agatha's character; her views, opinions, qualities, and failings. In what way she had been brought up; what sort of impressions had been made upon her in childhood; how it was that with so much talent and earnestness, and so evident a sense of right, she should yet take a view of things, to their comprehension, so distorted. They did not imagine they understood the whole of Agatha's mind and motives; what they did un-

derstand, only made the rest a greater puzzle to them.

“Agatha is very good, I am sure,” said Hester, after a thoughtful pause, “at least, she means to be very good : and I believe she thinks very little of her own comfort or pleasure, but still, don’t you think, Katharine, that she contrives to make us all feel very uncomfortable at times?”

“Yes; she seems scarcely to think it is worth while to be happy, and not being able to understand our ways of being happy, she never considers whether she can make any difference to us. I am speaking very vaguely, dear Hester, but I have an idea in my mind about Agatha’s way of thinking, though I cannot quite express it.”

“I think I see what you mean. But how about not being worth while to be happy? I suppose Agatha used to be happy at Greymore; at any rate, she is always looking back with regret to her life there.”

“Oh, I suppose so; but don’t you see, Hester, all Agatha’s notions of happiness are of one kind?—if people are not happy in the way she was at Greymore, she does not think their happiness worth having.”

“And yet our happiness must consist in the same things, I should think; for instance, affection: I suppose it was chiefly the love of her grandfather and aunt that made Greymore happy to her, and it is the

love of each other that makes home happy to us. Why does she not try to find happiness still in the same thing?"

"Yes, affection is the *great* thing. But there are many other little things which make up our happiness, and so it was with her at Greymore, and because these minor things are different, she concludes that there is no satisfaction in them."

"But you don't think, Katharine, that Agatha cared for a grand large house, and servants, and carriages? I thought she despised such things."

"So she does in themselves, and indeed, from all we have heard, the Marchmonts did not live in what is now called style; but still I have an idea she liked the solemn grandeur of the place and her position, and she was pleased to be considered Miss Marchmont of Greymore, the descendant of a noble race, and looked up to by the people around. You must have noticed that antiquity is Agatha's pet hobby, and that she considers people who have no ancestors deserving of pity. You must have noticed her intense reverence for the past, and for the descendants of people who have been great and celebrated."

"But I think she has reverence for more things than name and rank," said Hester; "I always fancy Agatha is rather an intellect worshipper."

"I do not call her so," said Katharine; "all her reverence is for intellect departed; she has very little for what belongs to our day; at any rate, she has

no sympathy for the clever men that rise from 'the people.'"

"Oh, no; the sound of 'the people' would frighten her."

"She would dream of republicanism and socialism, directly," said Katharine, laughing; then with a change of tone, she added—"We are at the old subject again, Hester. Whenever we talk of Agatha, we seem to be condemning her, and we do not get any further in understanding her; at least, to any purpose. The more we discuss her, the greater distance we place between her and ourselves. I almost think it is better not to study the people we live with, except to find out how we can please them."

"All have some virtue, if we leave it them
In peace and quiet; all may lose some part
By sifting too minutely good and bad,"

quoted Hester.

"Yes, the lines are true," said Katharine, "but I don't think we set out with the intention of sifting Agatha's good and bad."

"Yet we come to it at last, it seems," said Hester.

"Therefore, it is best to rest in ignorance, and take our incomprehensible sister as we find her: is not that your conclusion, Hester? Let us talk of something else."

But before they had started another subject, they

saw Agatha coming out of the house, and a little to their surprise, she joined them on the garden walk. She was not in the habit of sharing their twilight strolls, and she frequently spent the evening hours alone in the summer-house at the end of the garden. After a few desultory remarks, the conversation was chiefly carried on by Katharine and Hester; at length, Agatha, rather in connection with her own thoughts than with anything they were saying, abruptly inquired, "Who is Mr. Wentworth, Katharine?"

"Who!" repeated Katharine, colouring a little. "I don't know any more about him than we told you before. He knew Mr. Manners at college, and he is reading with him for something or other. I don't think he has quite made up his mind what he is to be."

"Oh! I did not mean that," returned Agatha. "I meant, who are his connections. Wentworth is a good old name; there are some Wentworths in the north at the present day; he may belong to that family."

"Let me see," said Katharine, with a shade, a very little shade of derision in her manner and voice; "Wentworth—Thomas Wentworth Earl of Strafford, beheaded by Charles I. of holy memory."

"Katharine," interrupted Hester, in a low voice.

Katharine changed her tone instantly.

“ Really, Agatha, I don’t know whether Mr. Wentworth belongs to any good family or not ; the only relation of his I have heard mentioned is the uncle who brought him up, Mr. Burton, a celebrated man in his way.”

“ Who did you say ?—celebrated ! ”

“ Mr. Burton, the great railway man ; I cannot give you a more precise definition of him, for my ideas of brokers, contractors, and shareholders are very vague. I only know that Mr. Burton has speculated very successfully and is extremely rich, and that he is chairman of a great many companies, and all the lines in this part of the world are under his control. You know he belonged to this neighbourhood originally.”

“ I have heard of him,” said Agatha, as if satisfied on the subject of Mr. Burton ; but, after a few moments, she added—“ And Mr. Wentworth has been brought up by this uncle ? ”

“ Yes ; his parents died when he was a child, and I believe he is altogether dependent upon his uncle. But Mr. Burton has only one child, a daughter, so, of course, he will provide for him.

“ Make him follow his own steps, perhaps, in speculation and money-making,” remarked Agatha, rather contemptuously ; “ but, as yet, he does not appear worldly.”

“ Mr. Wentworth ! oh, no ! ” exclaimed Katharine ; “ and I should not think his tastes would suit

Mr. Burton's mode of life: not that I mean to depreciate him, Agatha; such men are useful, and great too, in their way."

"A particular kind of greatness, I should think," said Agatha, with a look calculated to demolish Katharine's opinion and stop all further discussion of the subject.

It generally was so; Agatha would not enter into what Katharine called a good honest argument: she usually gave a curt expression of her own opinion, and an insinuation that that of her opponent was of no value, and there the matter rested. She had no idea of hearing what was to be said on the other side; though probably, if she had done so, her natural candour would have led her to acknowledge herself wrong in many cases. She was obstinate in her opinions, not out of opposition to others and a determination to remain unconvinced, but from a disregard of what they thought, and an incredulity as to the fact that they had reasons to support their notions as well as she had. This sort of shutting-up system was extremely annoying to Katharine, as, setting aside all other considerations, it seemed to indicate such thorough contempt for her understanding; and on the present occasion she could not remain insensible to the scornful indifference which Agatha implied rather in manner than expressed in words.

She walked in silence two or three times up and

down the path; then, seeing Mrs. Rivers coming into the garden to look at her flowers, as she generally did in the evening, she flew to meet her, certain of finding in her mother the sympathy which her cold half-sister perpetually denied.

"Your aunt Thorpe has just been here," said Mrs. Rivers, as Katharine joined her; "she wants you girls to go and spend the day to-morrow."

"Aunt Thorpe! how did she come? We did not see any one go into the house."

"No; she was in the pony carriage, and drove in the back way. I did not send for you, as she said she should only stay a minute."

"And stayed a great many, I suppose," said Katharine, laughing.

"No; she did not stay very long. She is expecting her friend Mrs. Oakenshaw, who is passing through with her niece on her way to the seaside, and that is why she wants you to go to-morrow."

"Are they going to stay at the Grange?" asked Katharine.

"Only for the day; they come by an early train to-morrow and go on the next morning."

"I wonder which of the nieces is coming," said Katharine.

"Grace, I believe; indeed I am sure of it, for Mrs. Oakenshaw took Susan last year, and you know they go with her in turn."

“I shall like seeing Grace Oakenshaw again,” remarked Katharine; “I have not seen her since I stayed at Foxton the winter before last.”

“I was thinking we might ask her to stay here on her return,” said Mrs. Rivers; “it will then be about midsummer, and Caroline will be at home, and we can have some picnics.”

“It would be very nice,” said Katharine, “and with Caroline’s friend, Miss Walters, we should be quite a house full. But is not midsummer rather early to leave the seaside?”

“It is some fancy of Mrs. Oakenshaw’s and her doctor’s. He says this is the best time of year for Hernpool, and that in autumn she must go to the south coast. I suppose Susan will go with her there.”

“And shall you invite Grace Oakenshaw tomorrow, mamma?”

“Yes: I think you may ask her when you go to the Grange, but I must speak to papa about it first. He may want to ask some one else, and, as you say, the house will be full.”

“Only girls can manage anywhere, and Grace will be like one of ourselves. To be sure, George will be at home then, and Agatha always monopolizes one large room.”

“By the by, your aunt wishes Agatha to go tomorrow, and I could not say anything against it, as she appeared the other night. But I suppose Agatha will not like to go.”

Katharine shook her head expressively.

“You must persuade her, Katharine; your aunt is urgent; she says that Agatha has never ‘broken bread’ within Meadow Grange, and her hospitable feelings are all in arms. She gave a good many hints about pride and high family, which I do not like to hear in connection with Agatha.”

“It is not pride which keeps Agatha from the Grange,” said Katharine, “at least not the pride Aunt Thorpe means, but she does not like the sort of thing; she looks upon a family meeting as a bore, and we are none of us wise enough or clever enough to suit her.”

“I know she does not like my family,” said Mrs. Rivers, with a little dignified air, which sat gracefully enough upon her habitually gentle manner. “I know she looks down upon the Thorpes, and as far as I myself am concerned, the knowledge would not trouble me, but I am annoyed when those belonging to me feel themselves slighted by my husband’s daughter. Katharine, you are a good child, and you managed well the other day; try to persuade Agatha to go with you to-morrow.”

“But, mamma, if you or papa would speak to her, it would make so much more impression.”

Mrs. Rivers hesitated: in truth, she was afraid of this unsympathizing, stern-eyed step-daughter of hers. At last she said—

“I do not feel that I can talk at ease with Agatha.

You, who are nearer her age, understand her better; and as for your papa, I do not wish to tease him, or bring her peculiarities more clearly before his eyes. He is sufficiently vexed by her continual gloom and unhappiness. You would not wish, Katharine, to make him see all the trifling little things which give pain to us."

"Oh, no," said Katharine; "I will try directly, mamma. I shall go up to Agatha and Hester, and speak to them together, including Agatha in the invitation as a matter of course. What time does Aunt Thorpe expect us to go?"

"The Oakenshaws are to arrive at the Grange about eleven o'clock, so you had better go soon afterwards. They dine at three, I believe."

"Three! that is fashionable for Aunt Thorpe, at least when Henrietta Brooke is not there."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, Henrietta is coming in about three weeks."

"Indeed!" said Katharine; "then she will be here with Grace Oakenshaw, and Lucy Grover will be back again at Fairfield by that time: what a party of girls we shall be!"

"See, Hester and Agatha are going in," said Mrs. Rivers, anxious to despatch Katharine on her errand.

Katharine ran across the grass-plot, and overtook her sisters as they reached the door-steps.

"Aunt Thorpe has been here," she said; "she

wants all of us to go to the Grange to-morrow—all the girls, I mean; Mrs. Oakenshaw and Grace are to be there for the day, Hester.”

Agatha was passing on without any remark after hearing this announcement, but Katharine added,

“We must go about twelve, I think; will that time suit you, Agatha?”

“Am I included in this invitation?”

“Of course you are: indeed, Aunt Thorpe particularly mentioned you.”

Agatha looked annoyed, but she had no excuse ready.

“I suppose, as I have appeared once at a party, I am expected to accept every invitation.”

“Aunt Thorpe will feel hurt if you refuse this: you have never been at the Grange, she says.”

“I must go, then, I suppose; I have no wish to be rude, and the day will pass somehow.”

“And what time shall we set out?” said Katharine, glad to have so speedily accomplished her mission.

“It is perfectly indifferent to me,” answered Agatha; “you understand these things better than I do: if you tell me the hour in the morning, I will be ready in time,” and she walked away, as if determined to listen to no further discussions.

Katharine gave a little despairing shrug of her shoulders, then turned to Hester to tell her the plan

of Grace Oakenshaw's visit, and to form various projects for picnics and excursions in the midsummer holidays.

Agatha was true to her word the following morning: she kept no one waiting. The heavy black bonnet and mantle were already assumed when Katharine knocked at her door, and nothing remained for her to do but to take her gloves and parasol from the little round table, and follow her sisters down-stairs.

"Your work, Agatha—you have forgotten your work," said Katharine, just as they were starting.

"Thank you, I shall not take any."

"But you will be dull without anything to do."

"I have only large pieces of work, and of a kind not suitable for visiting," said Agatha.

This was quite true: Agatha's habitual work was of a coarse homely description—garments for the poor, undertaken solely as a matter of duty. The vanities of crochet and embroidery she utterly eschewed; and Katharine, recollecting this peculiarity, said nothing more, and checked herself in the act of offering a bit of crochet edging to play with.

It was rather a hot walk across the fields, and no one talked much except Fanny, who was rejoicing in a holiday, and the prospect of spending several hours at Uncle Thorpe's, with free range over the garden,

orchard, dairy, and unnumbered delightful regions pertaining to a large farmhouse.

Meadow Grange was not a very picturesque building as you approached from the front. It was new, and square, and formal, and the garden before it consisted of geometrical flower-beds, cut in a circular grass-plot, on each side of which a broad gravel walk led in a curve to the house door. A spacious field was between the garden and the high road, the path through which had some pretensions to an avenue, but at present the trees were young, and little was visible but the squares of neat palings which enclosed them. The door of the house stood wide open to admit the fresh air and morning sunshine, and, there being no occasion to knock or ring, the girls walked direct to the drawing-room, but no one was there. They looked into the dining-room, but it also was untenanted.

“They are all in the back garden, I dare say,” said Katharine, opening a door into a side passage, where Agatha had never been before. The door at the opposite end was open, and led into a small enclosure, not at all resembling the garden in front. It was nearly all grass, but narrow flagged pathways intersected it in various directions. On one side was a high blank wall, forming the back of some of the farm buildings; two other sides were enclosed by a portion of the old, original house, to which the formal but comfortable new dwelling had

lately been attached, and the remaining one was fenced by a tall hedge of privet, with two or three fine large elder-trees rising in the midst. Old-fashioned flowers and herbs grew in quaint little beds, and in the middle of the grass-plot stood an ancient sundial. Under the elder-tree an old, half-moss-grown bench offered a pleasant resting-place, which, though so near the house, was solitary enough ; for this original part of the building was little frequented, and the small lattice-shaped windows rarely looked through. The lower portion, indeed, was used as a dairy, but the upper part merely served to contain some of the many and various stores which were heaped together by the thrifty mistress of the Grange.

Cool and quiet, shady and primitive-looking, this back-garden or dial-garden, as it was sometimes called, struck Agatha's fancy pleasantly : it had not much in common with the rest of the place, and seemed a remnant of some antique world. Though it bore little resemblance to any of her favourite haunts in former days, it yet harmonized more with her peculiar tastes and fancies, than anything she had seen since leaving Greymore.

She could have enjoyed an hour of solitary musing on that bench under the elder-trees, but anything like solitude was at present out of the question.

Voices, busy chattering voices, were heard, and up

the steps leading from the cool dairy trotted the active feet of brisk little Mrs. Thorpe, who was followed, more leisurely, by her visitors.

Agatha was greeted with all propriety, and formally introduced to Mrs. and Miss Oakenshaw, but after these ceremonies she was little more than a spectator of the scene.

After a few turns on the stone pathway, a little lingering under the elder-trees, and sauntering on the grass, it was proposed that the visitors should go inside and take off their bonnets, and Grace Oakenshaw volunteered to accompany them up-stairs.

It was evident that she and Katharine were on intimate terms: they had kissed each other affectionately on meeting, and had speedily launched forth into a sea of remembrances and associations. Agatha, as usual, formed an opinion of Grace Oakenshaw in two minutes: there was nothing objectionable about her, she must allow—nothing to remind her of the Thorpe connection, though she believed there was some distant relationship between the families. She was not pretty, or remarkable-looking in any way; most strangers described her as a “quiet lady-like girl,” and Agatha saw no cause to reverse the general decision. Probably, too, she was gentle and kind-hearted; beyond this she did not give Agatha the impression of having any character at all.

She and Hester did not seem very well acquainted, and, as Hester rarely talked unless another person

took the lead and drew her out, Grace and Katharine had most of the conversation to themselves, and Hester was several times obliged to remind her sister that they were all quite ready, and that Aunt Thorpe would think them a long time away, before the two could bring their fascinating chat, by the dressing table, to a conclusion.

Down-stairs it was rather stiff and dreary ; the girls took out their work, and sat near the round table, and Mrs. Oakenshaw made various questions about their proceedings at home, and the affairs of Fairfield, exchanging, betweenwhiles, scraps of old reminiscences and bygone gossip with Mrs. Thorpe. The two ladies had been a good deal together in their youth, and the Fairfield neighbourhood was familiar ground to Mrs. Oakenshaw. She was, however, a woman of a different stamp to *brusque*, honest Mrs. Thorpe ; she had mixed more with the world, at least with what she called the world, which, though not a very large one perhaps, was much more extensive than Mrs. Thorpe's world, and looked up to by her accordingly. A trim, precise, carefully dressed person was Mrs. Oakenshaw ; a great supporter of etiquette, and somewhat particular about the behaviour of her nieces. You would have fancied her an old maid rather than a widow, and in truth her married life had been short, as it had commenced after she had entered the forties, and her husband had only lived a few years. After his death, she

had easily glided back into the habits of her single life, and but for an occasional allusion to "poor Mr. Oakenshaw," no one would have remembered that she had ever had a husband. This forgotten individual had left her well provided for, and being, to do her justice, a good-hearted woman, she was able and willing to do many kindnesses to members of his family who were less flourishing than he had been. She established herself near Foxton, where her husband's brother resided, and as his daughters grew up to womanhood, she took them successively under her wing. Only two now remained unmarried, and of these, Grace, her present companion, was the youngest.

Agatha soon found her position rather a dull one; she did not care for gossip old or new, and the elder ladies' allusions to bygone events were as little interesting to her as inquiries about the Selby family, or conjectures as to what Mrs. Elsley meant to do with those two great boys of hers. She began to wish that she had, like her sisters, some work to busy her fingers, and to own to herself that after all, crochet, under some circumstances, was not to be despised. At such times as these, when any profitable employment was out of the question, it might be an acceptable resource, and she half made a resolution never in future to be without some light piece of work.

It was useless to try to amuse herself with books,

she felt instinctively that the Grange was not a place for them; Mr. and Mrs. Thorpe were not great readers, and Philip, if he read, certainly did not obtrude the works he studied on his mother's drawing-room table. It is true, books were scattered about amongst other articles of ornament; but they were chiefly "Books of Beauty" which Agatha had seen fifty times before, old-fashioned annuals, and other works of the like unreadable description. Prettinesses of this nature were not much in her way, and, though she did turn over the leaves of some of them, they could not engage her attention for more than a few moments. At length, she absently took up a piece of Katharine's work, which was on the table, and gradually became aware that, from the nature of it, it might furnish occupation for herself as well as her sister. It was a portion of one of those crochet couvrettes which are made in small pieces to be afterwards joined together, and as Agatha really did know how to crochet, though she affected to despise such work, she resolved to help Katharine. She asked for a crochet-needle and some thread rather awkwardly, fancying her sisters would express some surprise. Katharine, however, made no remark, but merely sought in her basket for the required articles.

"I think I can do it," said Agatha, taking the needle and examining one of the small circles of crochet.

“Oh, it is very easy,” returned Katharine; “if you can crochet at all, you can scarcely make a mistake, and if you do, it will not signify.”

“I like to see young people industrious,” remarked Mrs. Oakenshaw, on seeing the addition to the working party. “All my girls, as I call them, are great workers. Even Grace there, who is the idlest of them, is pretty well. You would be delighted, Mrs. Thorpe, with the counterpane Susan knitted last winter, all in small triangular pieces. She always had a little bit in her bag, and when she used to come and see me in the afternoon, she always brought it out, and knitted as long as she stayed. Grace, do you remember how many triangles she knitted in the railway journeys between Foxton and Crawley, when she used to go backwards and forwards to help Tom in getting his house in order?”

“Indeed, I forget, aunt,” answered Grace, “but a great number, I believe.”

“Dear, very creditable, I am sure,” said Mrs. Thorpe, “Katharine and Hester are very clever with their fingers too, but I am afraid young people now-a-days don’t care quite so much as they ought for plain work; at least, I know, when Charlotte Brooke is here, I have no end of trouble to make her look after her things. To be sure, she is young and careless, poor thing, and one should not expect too much; and Henrietta, who is older, is, I must say, a pattern in such ways.”

“My girls have always been taught that an attention to the state of her wardrobe is a befitting occupation for a true gentlewoman,” said Mrs. Oakenshaw, sententiously; “and I am thankful to say their conduct, in this respect, leaves nothing to be desired.”

It may be imagined that the above dissertation on industry and neatness was not much to Agatha's taste. It is true, she considered that both were duties, but her estimate of what was industry and what was neatness widely differed from Mrs. Oakenshaw's; and she would have looked upon the attention paid by the latter to minutiae as the extreme of frivolity. But she said nothing, and checked the impulse to throw away the piece of frippery she was working which she felt on hearing the history of Susan Oakenshaw's wonderful counterpane, and the number of, as she considered, wasted hours, spent in its manufacture.

“Poor Bessy Thorpe!” ejaculated Mrs. Thorpe, after a short pause; “what a careless, untidy girl she was! you remember her ways, don't you, Mrs. Oakenshaw?”

“Oh, yes; very well indeed. Poor Bessy! she always had a good heart though. Is she quite well? I should like to see her again, I think.”

“She is coming in the afternoon,” returned Mrs. Thorpe; “I asked her to dinner, but she would not come. She said she had a man working in the

garden to-day, and she liked to stay and look after him herself; she was always wild about a garden, you know. But she promised to come early in the afternoon, and I daresay by the time we have finished dinner, she will be here."

Katharine and Grace exchanged glances at this speech: they were both thinking of the immense party of ladies which Philip Thorpe would have to encounter, and the idea rather amused them; aware, as they were, of his want of ease in ladies' society.

Philip did not make his appearance till just before dinner, when he came into the room with his father. Uncle Thorpe was, as usual, cordial and hearty, but Philip looked grave and absent, and did not seem to care to talk, even to Katharine. He did not try to sit next her at dinner, and he suffered her and Grace to walk into the dining-room together; perhaps, in obedience to a hint from his mother that he was to lead in Miss Marchmont. Agatha spoke little to any one at dinner, and least of all to Philip Thorpe; and he, too, was silent, unless addressed by Mrs. Oakenshaw, or appealed to by his mother, so they did not add much to the liveliness of the party. But the rest managed to keep up a brisk flow of talk without their assistance, little Fanny, who sat next her uncle, putting in her word more frequently than Mrs. Oakenshaw approved. Fanny, however, was an especial favour-

ite at the Grange, and delighted Uncle Thorpe with her shrewd, old-fashioned speeches, so Mrs. Oakenshaw's grave looks were disregarded.

"And so you were all dancing away the other night I hear," said Mr. Thorpe to his little favourite, as he helped her to gooseberry tart and cream; "and was the little woman dancing too?"

"I did not dance much, uncle Thorpe, only some quadrilles with Lucy Grover, and a polka with Hester."

"And pray, were not any of the gentlemen gallant enough to ask you?" said Mr. Thorpe.

"I did not care for dancing with them," said Miss Fanny, shrugging her shoulders a little; "they dance so badly, except Mr. Wentworth, and I would not dance with him, though he asked me."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because I knew, though he asked me, he was wanting to dance with Katharine."

"Indeed, miss!" said Mr. Thorpe, laughing; "and how do you know that?"

"Well, because they were always dancing together, and talking together, and dawdling about the piano."

"Take care, little woman, Kitty will hear you."

"Oh, no, she won't; she is too busy talking to Miss Grace Oakenshaw; and, cousin Philip, you need not look at me in that way, to stop me; you know you saw it all as well as I did."

Philip's dark face flushed, and he turned to speak to Mrs. Oakenshaw, who was looking shocked at Fanny's audacity; Mr. Thorpe only laughed.

"And so you think this new gentleman is another of Katharine's admirers, Miss Fan?"

"I don't know, uncle Thorpe: he is very polite to her, and I am sure Katharine admires him, and so do all of the girls, for that matter."

"And do you admire him too?"

"He is very gentlemanly," said Fanny, "and he speaks to me as if I were a grown-up lady; but I have not seen enough of him to know what he really is."

Mr. Thorpe laughed again.

"There's a wise little body for you," said he, turning to Mrs. Oakenshaw; "she's not to be caught by outside show, but she must know people really before she judges them."

"Fanny is rather young, my dear sir, to form any opinion of gentlemen as yet," said Mrs. Oakenshaw, rather severely.

"She does though," returned Mr. Thorpe; "and, what is more, I would take her opinion before some people's."

Fanny heard the speech, and, of course, perked herself up a little more than usual in consequence.

"Wentworth! Wentworth!" soliloquized Mrs. Oakenshaw; "I wonder whether this is Marmaduke

Wentworth, Mr. Burton's nephew ; do you know, my dear sir ? I heard something about his residing with a clergyman, somewhere."

"I believe he is a nephew of Burton's ; the railway man, you mean ? but he is quite a stranger, and I don't know anything about him. I daresay you will make it out amongst the girls ; I suppose it is no use asking if you know his Christian name, Philip ?"

"No," answered Philip, shortly, "I never heard it."

"It begins with an M," said Fanny, "for he lent Katharine a song, and I saw 'M. Wentworth' at the back of it."

"Ah ! I shall inquire about him afterwards," said Mrs. Oakenshaw, and she changed the subject of conversation.

She did not forget her intended inquiries ; when the ladies were assembled in the drawing-room, cousin Bessy being by this time added to the party, she applied to Katharine for information respecting Mr. Wentworth.

"He is a nephew of Mr. Burton's," said Katharine, "and he was at Oxford with Mr. Manners ; I don't know whether his name is Marmaduke."

"Oh ! he is the young man I mean," said Mrs. Oakenshaw ; "Mr. Burton never had but one nephew that I heard of, and I know he sent him to Oxford."

“Do you know anything about him?” asked Mrs. Thorpe.

“About the young man? no; I think I have seen him drive into Foxton with his aunt, but that is all. I have heard a good deal about the family though; you know Mr. Burton bought Mr. Hewitt’s old place at Annersley, and, of course, since then there has been a good deal said about them at Foxton, and I heard, amongst other things, that Mr. Burton and this nephew did not get on exactly well together.”

“How was that?” asked Katharine.

“Well, I believe the young man was like most of the young people of the present day, and fancied himself wiser than those who had gone before him, and he would not enter into the plans his uncle had laid down for him. A capital opening there must be for him if he chooses to follow Mr. Burton’s profession; but it seems he objects to it, dawdles away his time at college, and will not even make up his mind what he is studying for, if he does study; and I always am doubtful about young men myself, though I have heard that neglect of his books is not one of his faults.”

“I wonder Mr. Burton sent him to college if he meant him to tread in his steps,” said Katharine.

“My dear, he wanted to make a gentleman of him: he was determined to give him every advan-

tage, that he might never feel the drawbacks he had done himself for want of education. I have no doubt he thought of getting him into Parliament, and the connections he would form at college might be useful to him. Depend upon it, Mr. Burton calculated that, in this way, he would be more likely to get on amongst the aristocracy, and help him, too, into their set."

"The rock on which the boasted pride and independence of the middle classes always splits," said Agatha, half to herself.

Katharine heard her.

"I wish I could deny that fact," she said, her face flushing; "but I fear you are right, Agatha. Still, you should remember there may be exceptions."

Agatha shook her head incredulously.

Meanwhile, Miss Bessy Thorpe had asked some questions about the Burtons; she was interested in them, having known Mrs. Burton when a girl.

"Oh! she is high and mighty enough now," replied Mrs. Oakenshaw, to one of these queries, "only county people must visit at Annersley, and she stalks about the Foxton shops like a queen. I must say though, she has been civil to me. She knows that I remember what she used to be, so she tries to conciliate me, that I may not remind other people of it. I have refused all invitations to Annersley so

far, except once, when there was a flower-show in the grounds ; and that was a half-public affair, you know. I have no notion of these new people setting themselves up like the real aristocracy. I am thankful to say I knew what good society was before Mrs. Burton ever came to Annersley, and when poor Mr. Oakenshaw and I used to visit at Lord Everleigh's we were always treated just like equals. None of the airs Mrs. Burton gives herself were to be seen there ; dear Lady Mary and Lady Louisa were such sweet unaffected creatures, and such gentlewomen ! ”

“ They have only one child, the Burtons, have they ? ” interrupted Mrs. Thorpe. She had heard the praises of Lady Mary and Lady Louisa pretty frequently before.

“ Only one ; a girl. That is what made young Wentworth's position the more fortunate, standing in the place of a son, one may say. It is to be hoped he will awake to a sense of his interest in time, and agree to his uncle's wishes.”

“ But what is Mr. Burton's profession, after all ? ” asked Katharine.

“ Oh, love, you must not ask me, I don't know what he calls himself. I only know he has a great deal to do with scrip and railway meetings, and makes money faster than most people ; but such matters are out of a female's province. One thing is certain, his nephew could follow in his steps if he wished. They have another scheme, I fancy ;

that he is to marry Alice Burton, and most likely he will fall into both plans at once."

"But she must be a child almost, I should think," said cousin Bessy, "for I know the elder children died."

"She is fifteen; quite old enough for him, for he cannot be more than three or four and twenty; in a few years the match might take place; not that, for my part, I approve of such early marriages."

"But he may object to her, as well as the railway business," said cousin Bessy.

Mrs. Oakenshaw smiled.

"Oh! trust Patty Burton for managing all that; she is quite clever enough to make up a match she sets her heart upon. My only doubt on the subject is, that if they go on getting richer and richer, and more aristocratic people noticing them, they will look higher for Alice."

"The girl might not like him either," said cousin Bessy; "I think cousins very seldom like each other if they have been much together."

It was an unlucky speech; good-natured Mrs. Thorpe looked suspiciously at Katharine, who coloured in spite of herself.

"I have an idea that Alice Burton is brought up to have no will but that of her parents," said Mrs. Oakenshaw. "To do Mrs. Burton justice, she is an attentive mother, and Alice is both a well-educated and modest girl, I am told. I should not think she

is likely to prove obstinate and stubborn, or take any fancies into her head."

"But, surely, parents have no right to dispose of their children's affections," said Hester, sententiously. It was the first time she had spoken, and this decided, gravely uttered remark made the others laugh.

"Capital, little Hester," said cousin Bessy, approvingly; "I quite agree with you, my love, and I hope you will keep your notions."

"Ah! Bessy," said Mrs. Oakenshaw, in a patronizing tone, "still your old romance, I see. And you encourage these children in all sorts of wrong notions, I am afraid—does she not, Mrs. Thorpe?"

Mrs. Thorpe laughed. "I don't know whether it makes any difference; young folks always were, and always will be, wilful, I suppose."

"Indeed," said cousin Bessy, in an extenuating manner, "I would not encourage them in anything really wrong and wilful, and against their parents' wishes, but I do think, and always shall think, that people should never marry those they do not love."

"Well! you are not far wrong there, Bessy," said Mrs. Thorpe, but Mrs. Oakenshaw only shook her head in a doubly patronizing manner. Katharine jumped up hastily, and threw aside her work.

"The sun has gone down low enough, I am sure, for it to be pleasant out of doors. Will you come and look at aunt's new greenhouse, Grace?"

Grace replied by rising and following Katharine through the glass door into the garden.

A general movement now took place. Cousin Bessy, too, wanted to see the greenhouse, and she and Hester walked off together, Agatha following them, glad of anything for a change.

“Oh, dear, what a relief it is to get into the air,” said Katharine to Grace, as, after a hasty peep at the greenhouse, they paced up and down the shadiest walk in the garden. “I got so tired of talking and hearing talk, did not you?”

“Yes: and I knew all about those Burtons. I had heard their schemes discussed a hundred times at Foxton.”

“Did you ever see Alice Burton?”

“I have seen her in the carriage sometimes with her mother, or shopping in Foxton, with her governess.”

“What sort of a girl does she seem? is she good-looking?”

“Oh! she is a little, slight, delicate thing; not in the least vulgar-looking, as you might fancy from her mother, and I dare say aunt is right in thinking they can do anything they like with her. I should not wonder if she turns out pretty: at présent, she is kept up very closely, and hardly any one sees her. I dare say she is intended to make a grand, sudden *début* some day.”

“Scarcely much use, if she is meant to marry her cousin,” said Katharine.

“ Oh ! I don’t believe that : it is a piece of Foxton gossip. I imagine they are more ambitious for her.”

“ What a pity it is,” said Katharine, “ that people who make their own fortune, cannot be satisfied, without pushing themselves into the class above them ! ”

“ They would not see any use in making a fortune, unless they did so,” said Grace. “ What use would all their money be, if they kept just in their old position ? ”

“ A great deal of use it might be, I should think,” said Katharine : “ they might surround themselves with refinement and beauty ; they might encourage literature and art, and further all kinds of improvements ; and they might travel and improve themselves, and cultivate their highest tastes, to say nothing of the immense good they might do to others.”

“ Yes, of course ; but do you think that half of the men who grow rich care for these things ? Fancy Mr. and Mrs. Burton being satisfied with the idea of being able to look at fine pictures, and read plenty of books ! ”

“ I don’t know anything about them,” said Katharine, “ but I should like to think that some of the enterprising men who raise themselves at the present day are satisfied to enjoy their prosperity in a rational manner. I don’t mean that I would have them to shut themselves up, or mix merely with those whom they knew in youth ; but I think they might

gather round them a set of deserving, talented, high-minded people—those without money or family, but Nature's noblemen—and thus create a class for themselves, instead of striving to enter the narrow, exclusive, and very likely humdrum circle of the aristocracy. Oh! it makes me angry when we middle-class people lose our own independence and crouch at the feet of those who despise us—and well they may despise us, when we lose our own self-respect."

Grace laughed. "You are a regular Radical, Katharine; I believe you would like to annihilate the aristocracy."

"No, I should not; I think it is a very proper sort of institution, and ought to remain; but as for encouraging the delusion that it is a sacred and superior thing, and that all our efforts should be directed to raise ourselves into it, it is quite a different affair. I should not like to be tried where so many fail, but my present feeling is, that I had rather belong to the middle class of England than any. But I am unreasonable, I dare say. All pride of class is bad, of one as well as another; you know my flights, Grace, of old."

"I don't know what has set you off on this flight to-day," said Grace; "you seem quite angry that the Burtons should try to push themselves forward."

"It must be very trying to him, if I am not greatly mistaken in him," said Katharine, musingly.

"Trying to whom?"

“To Mr. Wentworth; he is neither worldly nor ambitious, I am sure—at least, not ambitious in that sense.”

“You must tell me about this Mr. Wentworth; is he very delightful?”

“You can judge for yourself when you come to see us at Midsummer,” said Katharine; “he will be here then, and we shall have some parties and picnics.”

And the conversation fell into an eager discussion of the proposed Midsummer pleasures, till Fanny appeared to summon the two girls to tea.

It was odd that Philip had not made his appearance during the afternoon: he was not wont to absent himself when Katharine visited the Grange. At present, however, he seemed resolved to avoid her: possibly he might be jealous of Mr. Wentworth; still, he had been accustomed to see Katharine laugh and talk with strangers before, without any serious results proceeding from such behaviour.

In the evening he was in a manner compelled to be with Katharine, for soon after tea the whole party adjourned to the gardens and orchard, and Mrs. Thorpe contrived to keep them together. She was not much of a manœuvrer, kind, honest Mrs. Thorpe! but still her womanly tact could manage so much as this; as for ultimate results, they were far beyond her grasp and power.

Agatha, in the meantime, had been victimized by

Mrs. Oakenshaw, who, fancying the subject a congenial one, had expatiated on the superior manners of the aristocracy in general, and the individual perfections of the Lady Mary and the Lady Louisa, whom it had been her lot to know, when her husband was law agent to their noble father. Agatha could give little in return of the gossip of high life. Though the Marchmonts, untitled as they were, considered themselves meet for the loftiest circles of society, and in their prosperous days had been received there, yet in Agatha's time they had lived in so retired a manner, that she had not had much experience of society of any kind, and the names which Mrs. Oakenshaw quoted so glibly from the peerage were to her also merely names. It was the *prestige* of rank which Agatha valued; it was not from actual acquaintance with individuals that she formed her opinion of the immense superiority of the aristocratic class.

Neither did she care one atom for the newly-made honours and titles of yesterday; her veneration for rank was on account of implied descent—descent from a race who did noble deeds, and gained glory for them. Her admiration, after all, was for men who were noble, not for so-called *noblemen*, only she forgot to consider that the former might exist, not solely in the records of the poetic past, but amidst the turmoil of the prosaic present.

It may thus easily be imagined that, although

Mrs. Oakenshaw and Agatha agreed in reverence for rank, they looked upon it from different points of view, and their conversation was not particularly satisfactory. Mrs. Oakenshaw could not understand Agatha, and after a while she preferred to patronize cousin Bessy, and to listen to her accounts of the trouble she had had with a set of careless, flirting Marys and Janes, and of the treasure she had at last gained in a Phoebe who was steadiness itself.

"She is a little dressy, certainly," added cousin Bessy, "and I know she wears flowers inside her bonnet on a Sunday; but, after all, it is only natural, and I never notice it. Those smart-looking girls are generally the best servants, and Phoebe always comes in directly after church at night, and does not stay loitering about the lanes."

Agatha, finding herself released from being sole companion to Mrs. Oakenshaw, now made her escape, and contrived to find her way to the little garden with the sundial, which she had visited in the morning. No one was there now, and it looked quieter than ever in the evening light. The last rays of the setting sun streamed through the elder-trees, and long shadows lay on the deep green grass. Agatha experienced that indescribable feeling that most persons have known in some locality or other: that it was well with her here, and that there was some strange harmony between herself and the place. It seemed to call forth the better part of her nature,

and she sat down on the bench, and gave way to a fit of musing; not, as usual, dwelling entirely upon the past. Present affairs, and present experiences, were beginning to find place in her thoughts, and a faint attempt was made at ascertaining her true position, and determining what were to be her duties amid the new influences surrounding her.

It might be considered almost a turning point in Agatha's existence, the moment when she began to consider that the present had any claims upon her, and that she had a relative post to fill in the newly-opened scene of life. The dawning of such ideas was naturally accompanied by a good deal of self-reproach, and Agatha shrank from tracing out to its source the dim suspicion she felt that her system of reserve and abstraction in her own pursuits was wrong and selfish. The idea was not strong enough to take the form of a duty to be grappled with, and she soon allowed herself to be again carried along the stream of her ordinary thoughts, her reveries about the beloved past, her dreams of a comparatively happy future at Greymore; and in the anticipation of a round of imaginary duties to be fulfilled and virtues to be exercised when that future should arrive, she forgot her transitory impulse to inquire into those which belonged to the precious present.

At length, with a half sigh, she returned from dreamland to common earth and looked round her as if she had forgotten where she was. Her eyes fell on

a book which lay on the bench beside her, and which she had not before noticed.

She took it up, rather mechanically than with any curiosity about its contents. It was not a style of book that had much interest for her—a scientific treatise, relating chiefly to one of our latest improvements. The bent of Agatha's mind was not towards scientific studies of this nature; her taste led her rather to find pleasure in metaphysical subtleties, than in what she considered a *material* sort of knowledge. Still, having read a few sentences in the book, she was induced to go on; it was not written in a dry matter-of-fact way, but the subject was dealt with in a manner to interest even those to whom the technical details were so many words in a dead language, and she was involuntarily fascinated. She finished the chapter she had opened, and then turned to the fly-leaf at the commencement, rather curious to know to whom this book belonged: the name "Philip Thorpe" met her eye. She had no faith in graphiology, or she might have speculated upon the rather remarkable handwriting which she now saw for the first time. It was large and vigorous, and singularly devoid of flourish or ornament; as little Fanny said, cousin Philip's writing was all down-strokes. But though Agatha did not speculate upon Philip's character as displayed in his writing, she did speculate upon his taste in books. She had fancied that he scarcely read at all, certainly not such books

as this. Did he then really possess the amount of scientific knowledge requisite thoroughly to understand it, or was he, like herself, merely charmed with the style and interested in what he could not comprehend? Could it be that he who seemed to scorn the refining influences of life, who listened with apathy to music and saw no beauty in art, and who had no appreciation of the light literature of the day, which furnished others with topics of conversation—could it be that he had a decided taste for some particular, abstruse study, and that his mind was not always grovelling amidst “swedes” and “short-horns?” It was not often that Agatha honoured Philip with so many moments of contemplation as she was now doing, and she had not yet arrived at any conclusion when she was interrupted by the appearance of Philip himself. He evidently did not expect to see her, and he looked in surprise from her to the volume in her hand.

“I thought you were walking with Katharine,” said Agatha.

She did not make this remark with the slightest intention of raillery; she merely said the words as a matter of fact, and because she thought Philip would never speak unless she did; nevertheless, a red flush mounted to his dark brow.

“Katharine has plenty of companions without me,” he said, rather sharply; “I left them all at the bottom of the orchard.”

"I dare say it is almost time for us to go home," said Agatha, rising from the bench.

"There is no hurry, I should think," returned Philip; "I can drive you home."

"But I know the others made up their minds to walk, and Miss Oakenshaw was to go part of the way with us."

"Then they will not change their minds now, it is pretty certain," muttered Philip. His manner puzzled Agatha, but she would not show any interest by asking him questions. She merely gave him his book, saying,

"I found this on the bench, and it seems to be your property."

"I came to look for it," said Philip. "I left it here in the afternoon: have you been reading it?"

"A little; but I do not understand the subject. Yet I was interested in what I read."

"It is a thoroughly clever book," said Philip, with decision.

"And do you like books of this kind?" asked Agatha.

Philip half smiled: her manner expressed so much surprise and curiosity, under her assumed indifference.

"I believe you thought I did not know how to read," he said, "you seem so astonished that a book should interest me. I suppose you think because I don't care for their book-club, and know nothing of

the last number of somebody's story that they all talk about, that I can have no pleasure in reading a book of my own choosing."

"I confess I did not suppose you cared for reading," said Agatha. "And books of this kind appear to require so much previous knowledge."

"It would be strange if a man with so little to do as I have could not master all that," said Philip; "or do you think that it takes so many brains to look after crops and markets, that there are none to spare for anything else?"

"I did not know you had enough taste for any particular branch of study, to make you take so much trouble," said Agatha.

"No," said Philip, "you were like all the rest. You think that, if a man has not all he knows at his fingers' ends, his knowledge is worth nothing; you think, if he cannot make fine speeches about poetry and art, that his thoughts never rise above the level of his turnip-fields, and yet *you*, I should think, ought to have known better. It is possible, Miss Marchmont," he added, in a less bitter and more earnest tone than he had hitherto used—"it is possible for a man to have decided tastes for higher things, though circumstances may tie him down to what any clodhopper could perform."

"Certainly," said Agatha, "but there is surely no reason why, having such tastes, you should not pursue them openly, and at full liberty, instead

of concealing them so carefully that no one suspects them."

"You do not understand my position," he said, "and it would take more time than you or I should care to spend over it to make you understand it thoroughly."

"Very probably," said Agatha, "and I have no wish to penetrate any mysteries of yours. I suppose I shall find the others in the orchard," and she walked away with a more stately step than usual.

Little as Agatha knew or cared about love-matters, she was at no loss, on entering the orchard, to discover the cause of Philip's strange manner, when she had mentioned Katharine's name. The first persons she saw were Katharine and Mr. Wentworth, walking by the hedge, talking as usual, and too much occupied to observe her, though she passed near them. Mr. Manners was at the bottom of the orchard, where the rest of the party were collected except cousin Bessy, who had already started homewards, under the protection of the faithful Phoebe.

How Mr. Manners and Mr. Wentworth came there was a mystery to Agatha, and after returning a slight greeting from the former, she was curious enough to question Hester on the subject. The case was simple enough: a favourite field walk led past the end of the orchard, and Mr. Manners and Mr. Wentworth happened to have chosen it on this particular evening. Mrs. Thorpe had been close to the gate as

they were passing, and they had stopped to speak. The Grange was in the Coverdale parish, and Mrs. Thorpe had some inquiries to make about a *protégée* of hers, a sick old woman, and this had led to a little delay, and naturally the gentleman had entered the orchard. Here they were, at any rate, and one of them apparently quite at home. Before Mr. Manners had answered all Mrs. Thorpe's queries, his companion was walking by Katharine's side.

The two now approached the end of the orchard, and Mr. Wentworth, becoming aware of Agatha's presence, advanced to meet her.

There was a cordiality beyond courtesy in his way of speaking to her—a way which few people used with her. Cold persons appreciate charm of manner more perhaps than others do; and, though Agatha was accustomed to despise and detest what she called “manner,” there was something about Mr. Wentworth that soothed and gratified her. He was not at all *maniéré*; you could not guess beforehand what he would do and say, and sometimes he might have been considered abrupt or even rude; but he had one peculiarity which has an indefinable attraction for most women—he always seemed thoroughly to understand the person to whom he was speaking. It was this which made Agatha forgive what she had thought impertinence the other evening; it was this that made her now forget that she had esteemed him a mere frivolous chatterer. He and Katharine

did not again withdraw from the group, and for some minutes a general kind of conversation went on round the orchard gate. Even Agatha joined occasionally, generally induced to do so by some remark of Mr. Wentworth's, which contained beneath its light seeming something to which she could respond. It was not that he particularly addressed her, but she felt that he remembered her presence, and that some things he said were intended to appeal to her. He might not mean any flattery in this; he might not mean anything; but of all flattery there can be none so seductive as this, to the order of minds that would be shocked and disgusted at a more tangible species. There was a soothing influence in Mr. Wentworth's society, particularly after the interview she had just had with Philip Thorpe, when she had been vexed that he should think her curious on any point connected with him, and should cast aside her curiosity with a reserve as impenetrable as her own. Two days ago she would scarcely have believed that any one near Fairfield could have power to mortify her, or even to arouse her from her apathy; two days ago she would not have believed that any one near Fairfield could restore and soothe her wounded self-love. At three-and-twenty, people are not so impassive as Agatha was fond of imagining herself to be!

At last, some one spoke of going home; it was probably Hester, as, for practical purposes, she was the most thoughtful of the party.

“Where is Philip?” exclaimed Mrs. Thorpe. “Of course he will walk home with you. I will go and look for him whilst you put on your bonnets.”

“It is time for us also to take our departure,” said Mr. Manners; “our way is nearly the same as your nieces’, Mrs. Thorpe; will you not trust us to take care of them?”

“Oh, yes,” said Mrs. Thorpe, “but I know Philip meant to go; besides, he must go, Grace my dear, to come back with you, if you still think of going with the girls.”

“Oh, I am going, of course,” said Grace, and she followed Katharine and Hester, who were walking towards the house. On the way they summoned Fanny, who was helping one of the maids to pick gooseberries, and who could scarcely be led from this, to her, fascinating employment to put on her bonnet.

When they were all ready and descended to the hall they found the gentlemen waiting for them. Philip was also there, undergoing his mother’s questions as to what he had been doing with himself all the evening.

Katharine rather hurried through the parting ceremonies; she seemed anxious to put a stop to Mrs. Thorpe’s remarks, and to withdraw attention from Philip.

It was a pleasant evening for a walk, and Mrs. Thorpe said they would enjoy it, as she stood at the

door watching their departure. As long as she could see them, they were walking in a sort of cluster, not separating into twos and threes, but she said to herself that, no doubt, they would pair off presently. A few minutes later she would have seen the pairing off, but not exactly such as would have satisfied her. Katharine and Mr. Wentworth found themselves by insensible degrees walking a little apart from the rest, and Philip paced on gloomily between Agatha and Hester. Mr. Manners divided his attentions equally between Grace and Fanny, and in this manner they walked till they reached Hazel Bank. Grace and Katharine, who had fancied they were going to have a long conversation, not having exchanged two sentences.

The moon had risen by this time, and "What a lovely night!" was the universal exclamation, as good-byes were said at the garden gate.

Poor Philip! he shook hands with Katharine, and looked for one moment into her face. There was such an expression in it, at once so bright and so tenderly happy! What had called it there? Her features had never so lighted up for him.

What had this stranger been doing? Had he been saying soft, flattering words, which might pass glibly enough from *his* lips, but which Philip himself, with all his heart's strong devotion, could never utter?

Nothing of the kind in reality. Katharine and Mr. Wentworth had scarcely had any conversation that

could be called personal. The fact simply was, that he expressed opinions which pleased her ; she felt at ease and at home with him, and enjoyed talking freely about things which she liked. There might, indeed, be an undercurrent of feeling rising unsuspected in her heart, and it might be that his manner involuntarily gave token of something of the same kind taking place with himself.

Whatever it might be, Katharine felt very happy, and overflowing with kindness and tenderness to all around her, that night. Her parting kiss to her darling Fanny had never been more loving, and her good-night to Agatha had never been said with so much warmth before. She even said a few additional words which almost charmed Agatha into forgetting her failings, and seeking to have her for a friend. Their simplicity seemed to vouch for their earnestness ; they were merely an expression of thanks to Agatha for having become “one of them” for that day.

“It pleased aunt Thorpe that you went, Agatha, very much, and indeed it was very good of you, for I can understand that many things must jar unpleasantly upon you just now.”

As for Hester, of course Katharine and she did not say “good-night” till it was morning.

CHAPTER VI.

ATTEMPTS AT CONFIDENCE.

MOST people can recall some time of their life to which they look back as "that happy summer." Such a summer was now passing with Katharine Rivers; she might not at present be quite aware of its claims to that title, but assuredly in future years it would be thought of, perhaps alluded to, as "that happy summer long ago." Several circumstances combined to make it delightful: it was the first she and Hester had spent together as "daughters at home," and there were no anticipations of after the holidays to cast a gloom on either of them. Then, too, Grace Oakenshaw, whom she liked as a companion, and loved from childish associations, was staying in the house; and Caroline and her school-friend Cecilia Walters increased the mirth and frolic of the family circle. Picnics and rustic tea-parties were the order of the day, and the weather at the end of June and the beginning of July was unusually favourable for out-door amusements.

Mr. Wentworth, whatever might be the nature

of his studies with Mr. Manners, always found time to join these pleasure excursions, and as young men were more scarce than young ladies in the vicinity of Fairfield, he was always welcome. That his presence added to Katharine's enjoyment may be easily conceived; since the evening when they had walked together from the Grange, they had had numerous meetings, and always, wherever they might be, they contrived or chanced to be very much together. But after the first, there had not been much to call forth remark in Mr. Wentworth's attentions to Katharine. People saw that they liked to talk with each other, but still, in the conventional sense, few symptoms of actual courtship were visible.

Other people handed Katharine into carriages and sat next her at dinner, and Philip Thorpe had full liberty, if he pleased, to pay to her the delicate little attentions his mother was so anxious to enforce.

This absence of open devotion on Mr. Wentworth's part caused no annoyance to Katharine. She had, indeed, on former occasions been rather pleased to be singled out by those whom others were anxious to attract, and when first she met Mr. Wentworth, she had experienced some of the delights of gratified vanity, in knowing that his preference for her was remarked by the girls of her acquaintance. But by degrees it became different; the intimacy itself was prized, but not the show of it; a few precious words exchanged unobserved under some moulder-

ing archway, or within some leafy covert, on their pleasure-hunting days, were worth far more than handings in and out, and conspicuous conversations at dinner or supper. Vanity was for the present merged in the dawning of a deeper feeling. It might still remain in the character, but it was overshadowed and subdued, and it might be that the discipline of a high and pure affection, with all the trials attending it, would correct it entirely. It must be admitted, however, that there was nothing to wound Katharine's self-love in Mr. Wentworth's partial withdrawal of conspicuous attentions; if he did not pay them to her, she had the satisfaction of feeling that they were not transferred to another. He was merely civil to the rest of the world; lively and amusing, but perfectly general and indiscriminate in his conversations; perhaps he talked more to Agatha than any one, but Agatha seemed so utterly out of the pale of flirtation or love-making, that Katharine would as soon have suspected him of flirting with cousin Bessy.

The present was a happy stage of Katharine's life and her love: sweet, vague hopes flitted across the sunshine of her soul; rising trust and confidence, and forgetfulness of self in devotion to another, cast heavenly tints round the common events of daily life. And let it not be thought that Katharine was giving her heart too hastily and easily. Mr. Wentworth was, it is true, but the acquaintance of two months; but in two months, when people are

continually meeting, continually talking together, continually finding new sympathies and points of union, more approach to real intimacy and mutual understanding may be made than in the routine acquaintance of years, when the electric touch of congeniality is absent. And Marmaduke Wentworth was one whom it was no disgrace to love. It was not merely because he was agreeable and intellectual that Katharine was attracted by him; his judgment was sound as well as acute, and he had a way of looking straight to the truth of things, and an unflinching determination to abide by the right when once he was convinced of it, which she had not met with in any one before. Not that he was by any means faultless; he had some very grave failings: his acuteness of perception made him at times sophistical, that is to say, where his feelings were concerned; and, though resolute in doing right when his mind was made up, he had a tendency to delay and to put aside the consideration of what he ought to do. His very determination to deny himself and follow the course of duty when it was plain to him, led him sometimes to deceive himself, and to neglect to examine what he was about. He was indolent too, by nature and habit, and it was difficult to rouse him quickly to any decided action. But with all his faults, the ground of his character was true, and noble, and generous; and surely, with the addition of all his

external advantages and accomplishments, it cannot be wondered at that a country girl like Katharine should suffer her heart to be wiled away from her, before it was asked for in direct terms.

But how was this happy summer of Katharine's passing with Agatha Marchmont? It could not be exactly a happy one to her; and yet, during the last few weeks, a change had come over her. Life seemed no longer so dreary and uninteresting; she felt as if she were waking up to more lively emotions and interests—as if the youth which had seemed pressed out of her life were rising up again within her—as if hopes and fears, which she had considered in the abstract as far removed from herself, were now claiming a part in even her existence.

She might appear little changed to others; the habits of reserve and apathy were so formed in her, that it was difficult to break them, and an incalculable effort was required to make a kind or cordial speech which her heart dictated.

Frequently, too, she was repelled and thrown back upon herself by some remark from one of those who surrounded her, which reminded her of the wide gulf of sentiment and opinion which separated her from them, and revived her old pride of isolation. This kind of feeling was not so often awakened by Hester and Katharine as by their companions. Even Grace Oakenshaw, though in many respects unobjectionable, sometimes uttered observations which

betrayed a tone extremely repugnant to all Agatha's preconceived notions, and the endless chatter and school-girlish jokes of Caroline and her friend were still more displeasing to her. One evening, about a fortnight after the commencement of the holidays, Agatha and Katharine were sitting together in the schoolroom. The early part of the day had been sultry, but in the afternoon showers had fallen, and it was now too wet for walking.

Agatha was in that desultory sort of mood which occasionally attacks even the most regular and industrious, and she had been wandering from room to room, unable to settle to anything, and half-resolved to set out and brave the splashing road and dripping trees. She had now taken up a book, which, though very different from her usual style of reading, happened to interest her, and she was reclining, in more listless fashion than was her wont, in the only arm-chair the room contained.

Katharine sat by the window, on Fanny's low stool, sometimes reading a book which lay on her knee, but more frequently looking out, rather dreamily, into the green garden plot before her, or watching the water-drops falling from the leaves which clustered round the window. She, too, was in a lazy mood: perhaps the weather had some influence over both sisters; but Katharine's was a more pleasant day-dreamy description of idleness than Agatha's, and unmixed with restlessness. She had been in-

dulging herself during part of the afternoon with a volume of Tennyson, which Mr. Wentworth had lent her, and now she was enjoying a delicious train of thought called forth by her reading.

The evening was just fitted for such occupation and such dreaming: there was a cool freshness in the air, though scarcely enough breeze to stir the leaves of the trees, and everything around breathed a luxurious stillness, quiet but not solemn, tranquil but not dull. The very dripping of the raindrops from the trees had not a cheerless sound, but seemed to form a lulling cadence to the thoughts. All nature was rich and full, and bursting with luxuriant growth. Katharine looked up from Tennyson's *Margaret* and thought that on such an evening as this that poetic invitation must have been addressed. She repeated the words, half lovingly, lingeringly, to herself, forgetting that Agatha was present. But Agatha was not so much absorbed in her book as to lose them.

"What are you repeating there, Katharine?" she asked.

Katharine coloured slightly. "I was only reading some lines of Tennyson's," she said.

"Say them again, will you?" was the rather authoritative rejoinder.

"Nay, you had better read them yourself," said Katharine, laughing and giving Agatha the book.

She took it, read the lines, but made no remark,

and Katharine could not trace her opinion in her face. She kept the volume in her hand and turned over the leaves.

“Mr. Wentworth’s, I see; he once spoke to me of Tennyson. Apparently he is a favourite with him, and some passages are marked; did you observe them?”

What a question! as if Katharine had not read every marked passage twice over, before looking at any other. But she made no answer beyond a demure Yes, and Agatha did not speak again for some time. She, too, was pondering the marked passages.

“Do you suppose he believes in this himself?” she asked at last, pointing out some lines to Katharine.

“Tennyson? I should think so.”

“I did not mean Tennyson, but Mr. Wentworth. Don’t you see he has marked nearly the whole of this passage.”

The lines were those on “Love and Duty.” Katharine glanced rapidly over them.

“I do not see why one should disbelieve anything in this,” she said.

Agatha smiled doubtfully.

“Then what becomes of all the blighted hearts in the world? According to this, love never brings real misery.”

“I have not much faith in blighted hearts,” returned Katharine, “and surely you, Agatha, must

prefer this noble belief to a more sentimental one. Don't you feel the truth of this?

"Shall sharpest pathos blight us, knowing all
Life needs for life is possible to will?"

Surely there need be no blighted hearts in the world."

"The lines are brave lines, I own," said Agatha; "but I fear experience is against them."

"Why, you are the last person I ever expected to argue in this way," exclaimed Katharine. "I thought you would have scorned the weakness that could sink under any blow an unfortunate attachment could give. You would only think a *very* weak mind capable of giving way to it."

"I am not speaking without reason," said Agatha, after a moment's pause. "I have seen a strong mind laid prostrate by such a blow: a life, if not shortened, made desolate ——" she checked herself.

"Believe me, Katharine," she added, "it is much safer to avoid the danger altogether, and not to run the risk of desolation for the chance of possible happiness."

Katharine did not immediately reply, but by and by she said—

"I can scarcely imagine a case, Agatha, where people are not happier for having loved—happier and better too, I think. Look at cousin Bessy! I know that she had some kind of love-disappointment

when she was young, and how much nicer and kinder and better she is now than people whose feelings have always been in a dead calmness! how sympathizing she is, and fond of young people, and fresh-hearted!”

“I do not know enough of Miss Thorpe to judge how far you are right,” said Agatha, coldly; “and really, Katharine, I think any one would be amused at your tracing a person’s fresh-heartedness to the fact of her having been disappointed in love.”

“It sounds a contradiction, certainly,” said Katharine, “but it is true, I think, nevertheless. I suppose, however, very much depends upon a person’s disposition: what would blight and sour one, only brings out higher good in another.”

“I can scarcely grant that,” said Agatha; “the life I have seen so blighted was fitted for——I may as well speak out, Katharine. My aunt Agatha was the person whose sufferings I saw. Years ago, before I was born I believe, she loved and was disappointed, and the effects of that unfortunate attachment remained to her dying day.”

“But how?” asked Katharine. “Was her temper soured, or did she look on everything in a gloomy way, or were all her feelings deadened?”

“Not any of these things precisely. Her temper certainly was not soured, and she had still warm affections for a few, but she was always sad, and life seemed dark to her. Her notions were rather morbid.

I did not think so then, but now I can understand that to most people they would appear so. She thought and spoke with great bitterness of love and lovers, and was inclined to mistrust all men."

Katharine shook her head.

"Your aunt's case proves nothing to me," she said. "I can pity her, and feel interested in her; but you must excuse me, Agatha, if I say that I don't think her mind could have been originally of a very high order, or it would not have become at once so thoroughly warped. I think a large mind would never quarrel with a whole race and a whole set of ideas for the sake of its own particular wrongs."

"I do not know what you call a large mind," said Agatha, "but you just now brought forward Miss Thorpe in illustration of your views. I think I may safely affirm that my aunt's mind was of a higher order than hers. However, you did not know her; you never *can* know what she was——" and Agatha turned away abruptly as if to close the subject.

"But I can guess what she was to you," said Katharine, kindly. "You must forgive my seeming to depreciate her, but I was merely speaking of her as I should of a character in a book, knowing nothing of her but the few words you have just said. Tell me her history, Agatha. I should like so much to hear about her, and about all your old life at Grey-more."

Agatha was touched by the earnest kindness of Katharine's voice, and she said,

"I never knew that you cared to hear of such things, and I cannot speak of Greymore unless I feel sure that I shall be understood. I believe you, however, Katharine, and I will try sometimes to speak to you freely. It will, perhaps, be a relief to me—but there is a noise in the passage; some one is coming to interrupt us."

"Few people penetrate into the schoolroom," said Katharine; after listening for a moment, she added, "Yes, you are right, I hear Henrietta Brooke's voice; she is asking Fanny where I am."

They were indeed interrupted, but neither of them guessed how serious that interruption was to prove—the weary length of time that was to pass before the lately woven thread of intimacy would be taken up again at the point it had just reached.

Almost before Katharine had finished speaking, the door opened and a young lady in a riding-habit entered the room.

She was a tall, rather fine-looking girl, or more properly young woman, for Henrietta Brooke was past the age of mere girlhood, and farther advanced in the twenties than she would have cared to acknowledge. With a good figure, always displayed to the greatest advantage by a careful and well-fitting costume, animated, brilliant eyes, capable of speak-

ing any language she chose, and a frank, plausible manner, which at times became almost caressing, it may be supposed that Henrietta Brooke was generally considered a very charming person. But there was a something indescribable and undefined which counteracted the effect of her charms in the eyes of those who were either very clear-sighted judges of character, or who were gifted with that intuitive perception which sometimes belongs to the very young and innocent.

From different causes, perhaps, neither Agatha nor Hester liked Henrietta. Katharine judged her more leniently, and, though occasionally inclined to distrust her when she was absent, she rarely spent many minutes in her society without being gained over by her silvery-tongued plausibility, and giving her, for the time at least, full sympathy in whatever engaged her attention. When Henrietta Brooke stayed at the Grange, it was easy to see that she ruled the house: her kind, simple-minded aunt, little as she herself suspected it, was easily turned round her finger, and Mr. Thorpe and Philip never took the trouble to oppose any of her measures. Mrs. Thorpe never imagined that she was anything more than the most obedient of nieces; she was fond of her, liked her lively, pleasant ways, and was proud of her appearance and winning manners. It was agreeable to her to have such a handsome, elegant young woman to assist in entertaining her guests,

and her only wonder was, that Henrietta remained Henrietta Brooke still.

Katharine, knowing her aunt's fondness for Henrietta, wished many a time that she had been fixed upon, instead of herself, as Philip's future bride, not being aware that this was a measure which would not suit any of the parties. Mr. Thorpe was quite as fond of his relations as his wife was of hers, and, besides, neither of them, generous and kind as they were, ever contemplated a wife for their son so utterly portionless as Henrietta would be: one, too, of a needy family, for ever struggling to keep up appearances. No: she was delightful as a confidential niece, to have staying in the house, but to be Philip's wife—that was quite a different matter.

And Henrietta, too, had aims of her own, far above anything that Meadow Grange could offer; and, though time had a little sobered her exalted views, she could never have thought very patiently of passing the rest of her days at a retired farmhouse, with Philip Thorpe for a companion.

But during this digression many words have been exchanged between Katharine and her visitor. Henrietta's greeting was, as usual, warm and cordial; you would have fancied that she considered Agatha quite an old friend and Katharine almost a sister. But Agatha made little response, and only watched the new-comer with her penetrating eyes, and thought

how unlike she was to Mrs. Thorpe. She could not accuse her of the vulgarity which she had imagined to lurk in all the connections on that side of the family; in manner, in speech, in bearing, at any rate, Miss Brooke was a perfect lady. But there was that hidden something in the background; the tone of mind might be low and mean for all that gracious manner, those well-turned sentences, and sympathizing smiles.

"I think I took you by surprise, Katharine?" said Henrietta, sitting down on a chair near the window.

"Yes; I did not hear anything before your voice in the passage, and it has been such a rainy afternoon, I scarcely thought of any one venturing out. But how did you come? I mean, who has been riding with you?"

"I was just going to tell you. Your brother Henry came over to the Grange on some kind of business, and as I was dreadfully *ennuyée* with a long wet afternoon, and I wanted, besides, to consult you about a project of mine, I asked him to escort me, and I must say the little boy is turning out a most accomplished cavalier."

"'Little boy!'" said Katharine, laughing; "you must not let him hear that, or you may ask him in vain to ride with you another time."

"Trust me, my dear, for better management; if he had been an old bachelor of sixty, I could not

have treated him with more deference than I have just been doing."

"But what is this project of yours, Henrietta?" asked Katharine.

"A most delightful one, if we can manage to carry it out properly; it came into my head yesterday, when my uncle took me a long drive to show me the new farm he bought the other day. Have you ever seen the place?"

"Brakely, you mean? No; I have never been there, but some one was telling me the scenery was very picturesque."

"Yes; it is pretty," said Henrietta. "Not a quarter of a mile from the house there is an old mill, a capital object for you sketching people, and a little noisy, brawling stream, the water clear and cold—as cold as ice. And by the stream there are shady walks where people may lose themselves hunting for wild strawberries: altogether, a place made for a picnic."

"It sounds very inviting certainly, does it not, Agatha?" said Katharine.

"Yes, I dare say," answered Agatha, who had been gradually freezing into an icicle since Henrietta's entrance.

"And the project, I suppose, is a picnic to this mill?" said Katharine, turning to Henrietta.

"No, not exactly a picnic. Don't you see the house is empty at present, and though only an old-

fashioned little place, I think we might manage to have a very pleasant party in it. There is a room large enough to dance in, and another tolerable one for supper, or indeed we might dance outside on the grass, only grass is so heavy. But whatever we do, we must do it at once, as Mr. Thorpe talks of commencing alterations for the new tenants who are going into it."

"But what becomes of the pretty mill, and the walks, and the stream, if we are only to have a party in a house?"

"My dear little Katharine! you are really unusually dense this evening. Don't you see that it is possible to combine two amusements, and have a sort of *fête champêtre*? Don't you think something of the kind might be managed?"

"Oh! I see," said Katharine, her face brightening as the scheme dawned upon her. "It would be a delightful affair, and quite a novelty! Agatha, *you* would like that, I think?"

"Miss Marchmont has left the room," said Henrietta; "but perhaps we are better alone to discuss this mighty plan. I depend upon you, Katharine, to help me to carry it out. In the first place, we must get the consent of the higher powers; I have said nothing about it yet. Then we shall have to make the house presentable, and send over such furniture as we require for a rural entertainment."

"Oh! it must be quite simple, you know," said

Katharine ; “ nothing to remind one of a formal party in a regular house.”

“ Of course not ; but still we shall want something ; a few tables, and chairs, and benches, and so forth. And I think you and I might go over the day before and arrange things. We can make the place look pretty and tasteful, without any formality. Plenty of flowers, and some white muslin and pink calico for draperies, will do wonders.”

“ And do you mean the people to spend the whole day there ? ”

“ Why, not exactly ; they might assemble about noon, and ramble about in the woods, and have luncheon out of doors ; and then, in the afternoon, adjourn to the house and have a rest : afterwards dance, and have supper, or whatever you choose to call it—strawberries and cream, you know—and everything in rustic style ; and the whole would be over early enough to have a pleasant drive home, without horrifying Fairfield by our dissipated hours.”

“ Then for music,” said Katharine, “ what have you arranged ? ”

“ Oh, the Grange piano can be sent over.”

“ But such a distance ! ” exclaimed Katharine.

“ It is only eight miles,” said Henrietta, “ and the shaking will not hurt the jingling old instrument ; it is as bad as it can be, and only fit for dancing to. Oh ! I am sure my aunt will pack it off in a cart most willingly. But we might have those fiddlers

and nondescript musicians who played at Mrs. James Thorpe's party last winter; they play odiously, certainly, but it will be better to have them than to depend entirely upon the piano, particularly if we dance outside, for we could scarcely hear it."

"We shall hardly want the piano at all, in that case," said Katharine.

"Oh, my dear, we cannot get on without a piano. A party always flags without one, unless it is a regular ball. I am sure, Katharine, *you* have found a piano useful before now. Don't tell me you have not; I have seen your proceedings often enough."

Katharine made no reply to this speech, but she felt in her heart rather glad that Agatha had left the room; she knew that she was the last person in the world to understand this kind of raillery, and that she considered the most trifling approach to it a mark of bad taste. Henrietta soon went on with the explanation of her plans, and a considerable time was passed in a discussion in which Katharine soon became as deeply interested as her visitor could desire. Agatha, meanwhile, had put in practice her former intention of venturing out for a walk. Quickly putting on her bonnet and shawl, she left the house without being observed, and began walking along the high road at a rapid pace. She was angry and annoyed, and exercise seemed necessary to restore her equanimity. The damp evening air cooled her hot brow, and the calmness of nature

seemed to reprove her irritated spirit. It was unreasonable to be annoyed when there was apparently so little cause for it, but Agatha was not just then in a reasonable mood. She was vexed with herself for having broken through her general rule, and spoken of that beloved aunt whose loss she never ceased to lament. She had brooded so constantly over the remembrance of those who were dear to her that a saint-like halo seemed to surround them, and it was almost sacrilege to discuss, or to hear others discuss, either their virtues or their failings. And now she had lifted the veil, and disclosed the sufferings and sorrows of the dead to the eyes of another, and, though she had been impelled by an irresistible impulse to be confidential with Katharine, she had speedily regretted her unreserve. Henrietta Brooke's entrance had banished all thought of finding sympathy in her present home, and the manner in which Katharine had almost immediately thrown her whole interest into the discussion of a picnic, proved, she thought, that there could have been no earnestness in her previous seeming kindness and desire to know more of her own former life. In future it would be well to lock up all precious memories still more closely in her own breast, and not expose them to a gaze which, after all, was merely careless and curious.

Agatha, as yet, had not learnt to do justice to Katharine. She judged others by herself, and

when they differed from her in temperament she was unable to make allowances. Because she could not turn readily from one interest or emotion to another, she concluded that all who did so were either acting deceitfully or incapable of feeling seriously. With such a disposition, and such a way of viewing things, the most trifling occurrences of daily life became positive trials, and in spite of her assumed indifference Agatha was continually receiving pain and annoyance from causes few persons would imagine capable of hurting her.

She had, however, walked and reasoned herself into a somewhat calmer frame of mind, and was beginning to think of retracing her steps, when she saw some one advancing towards her from the direction of Fairfield. A few steps further assured her that it was Mr. Wentworth, and she saw his approach with a sensation not at all resembling the usual vexation she felt on meeting acquaintances.

She had now conversed with him many times, and she had never changed her first impression that he was not at all like a Fairfield person. Such an admission from Agatha implied considerable praise. At times, certainly, she had thought him frivolous, but never when he had been speaking to herself, and the feeling that he understood her had been present with her from the first.

Agatha had led a very retired life, and known few companions of her own sex, and with any of the

other she had never advanced beyond the most distant terms. Mr. Wentworth was the first young man who had ever spoken with her in an intimate manner; the first who had drawn out, or rather guessed, her opinions, and laid his own before her on any but the most trivial and uninteresting topics. She certainly did not agree with all his notions, but still there were some cherished ones which they shared in common, and perhaps it was this which gave an indefinable charm to her intercourse with him. She never dreamt of asking herself whether he liked her, or how it was that he would, at any time, leave her for a chance of being with Katharine, neither did she puzzle herself to find out the reason that even to Katharine herself he avoided showing any very marked attention.

Everything connected with flirtation and manoeuvring was so entirely out of her element, that the questions which had already occurred to some of the gossips of the neighbourhood, never troubled her. Thus, though reserved and stately, she had no prudish self-consciousness, and she had not the slightest hesitation in turning round with Mr. Wentworth and walking homewards in his company. She was just thinking of turning when she met him, and there was surely no reason for her to change her mind because he was going in the same direction; and though the straight road to Coverdale did not lead past Hazel Bank, and she reminded Mr. Wentworth

of the fact, he could not think of leaving her unguarded in the darkening evening.

So they walked on together, sometimes talking, sometimes in silence. Agatha seldom talked much, and Mr. Wentworth understood her too well to be for ever tormenting her with endeavours at being agreeable.

The sound of horses' feet aroused both of them from a kind of reverie, and as they looked up a lady and gentleman passed at a swift canter. The lady bowed to Mr. Wentworth, and cast a glance of surprise at Agatha, in another moment she was out of sight.

"Miss Brooke! is it not?" said Mr. Wentworth.

"Yes," said Agatha, "and Henry Rivers; I suppose he is taking her home, though this is not the proper road. She was at Hazel Bank when I came out."

"You did not think it necessary to stay to entertain her?" said Mr. Wentworth, with a half-smile.

"There were plenty to do that without me," said Agatha, shortly; "she and Katharine were talking together."

"Are they great friends?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"I don't know," said Agatha; "Miss Brooke appears to have a great many dear friends."

“You are getting sarcastic, Miss Marchmont. I can see you are not very fond of Miss Brooke: there we differ, for I admire her extremely.”

“I dare say most people *admire* her,” said Agatha, carelessly; “she is very good-looking.”

“No, not *very*; but she has admirable tact and taste, and makes the most of what she is. But it is her mental powers that I admire.”

Agatha looked incredulous.

“I see you are surprised. I dare say you think you know the measure of her mental powers, and because she does not read Dante, and cannot draw comparisons between Kant and Coleridge, and does not even profess to care for such things, you consider her mind of a very mediocre stamp. But she is a clever woman for all that, and can drive an aim straight to its end, unless——upon one point I am not quite sure about her; but her character is worth studying, and does not come in one’s way every day.”

“I did not think there was anything so unusual about her,” said Agatha; “and even if she is what you say, I should not have fancied you admired cleverness of that kind.”

“I admire its energy, and the way it commands success. What you and I call finer natures never get on in this world. Don’t you remember discussing this subject before, when you inveighed against the spirit of the age?”

“Yes,” said Agatha, “but I fancied then you despised the success that could be gained by low means, and that you would rather be unprosperous and keep your better nature untarnished than——”

“I do feel so generally; but at times, it seems a grand thing to get on in life, as people say, and I mourn over my desultory habits and fruitless studies, and wish I could turn myself into a purely practical man, and cast aside all other fancies. You do not know how important it is to me, and the two different lots that are spread before me. If I could make up my mind to renounce my dreamy ease and unpractical visions, I might have a chance of becoming a wealthy and influential man—is not that the term?—in short, a respectable member of society.”

“And perhaps forfeit the best part of you and your only real happiness,” said Agatha.

“I don’t know that: happiness might attend the one lot as well as the other; nay, it might lead to a happiness I could not hope to enjoy in any other way. Besides, one must be something; one cannot go through life merely dreaming and studying.”

“But I thought you intended to be a clergyman?”

Mr. Wentworth shook his head.

“No, I am not, I never should be, fitted for one. I do not think any one should be a clergyman except from real inclination, and from a feeling that it is his appointed office. I cannot feel this, and

if I went into the church it would be only to get a living, of which I should have a pretty good chance. *You*, of all people, would not recommend me to do that, I fancy."

"No," said Agatha, "if you really feel in that way, but I cannot believe you would enter into any profession from mere mercenary motives."

"Indeed you do not know me; it is the most anxious desire of my life to enter upon some course that will enable me to earn my daily bread. No man has a right to hold up his head in society unless he can do so. Of course I except those who are born to large possessions; there are other duties and other responsibilities for them. But nothing can be more despicable than the desultory kind of life I lead. Look at that man leading those cart-horses home; he is infinitely more respectable than I am; he makes his own position and keeps it; I have none. But I beg your pardon, Miss Marchmont, I ought not to trouble you with the discussion of my own affairs. I have no doubt you despise me for not keeping such things for my own private contemplation, particularly as my actions do not correspond with my words."

He was wrong, however. Agatha, like most reserved persons, was pleased when another appeared to confide in her; besides, she was already interested in Mr. Wentworth, and she could have listened patiently to a much longer explanation of his pro-

spects and his plans, if indeed plans they deserved to be called.

But though she made a trifling effort to pursue the subject, he did not choose to dwell upon it, but began to talk of something different, the weather, the scenery, and other general topics.

He was no stranger to Agatha's want of admiration for the Fairfield neighbourhood, and he knew enough of a different kind of landscape to understand the complaints she made that the views were tame, and that the perpetual fertility and cultivation fatigued her eye.

He had seen the northern moors on which her fancy loved to dwell, and he could share in her reminiscences of the wild fell-side, wreathed with misty cloud, and the lonely tarn in the mountain hollow. Though he had never actually been at Greymore, he knew the surrounding country, and Agatha could speak to him of her favourite scenes without the fear of wearying him, or of having her enthusiasm deemed ridiculous. As for him, he looked with astonishment on the pale, morose girl by his side, when some sudden burst of remembrance flashed across her, and seemed to transform her to a different being. She spoke with animation, and her cold, clear eye kindled when she described some far-away, well-remembered spot.

The passion for her early home was almost as strong in Agatha's breast as that of the Swiss

mountaineer for his native land. Amidst such talk Hazel Bank was soon reached. Agatha parted with her companion at the gate, and slowly sauntered through the shrubbery to the house. She was no longer angry and annoyed, and she joined the merry party at the supper table, with a countenance a trifling degree less grave and gloomy than usual.

CHAPTER VII.

GIRLS' CHATTER.

"WHERE is Katharine?" asked Agatha, one morning, as she entered the drawing-room, where her other sisters and their friends were sitting at work.

"She has gone into Fairfield with Henrietta Brooke," returned Hester, "to make some arrangements about that party at Brakely."

Agatha turned round and was about to quit the room, when Hester looked up, and seeing she held a bonnet in her hand, said—

"Is it anything you want Katharine to do for you, Agatha, as perhaps I can do it?"

"Only this bonnet," said Agatha, in rather a hesitating manner. "The weather is so warm, I cannot bear my heavy crape one—and this is not much lighter, but I thought perhaps it might be altered. Besides," she added with some effort, as Hester was examining the bonnet, "it is ugly, and I do not like it."

Grace Oakenshaw looked up in astonishment; it

was something so unlike Agatha to care about the trimming of her bonnet.

"It only wants a lighter lining," said Hester, "something transparent will make it quite a different bonnet."

"Do you think so?" said Agatha; "then I will send it to Miss Green's to be done," and taking the bonnet from Hester, she was again preparing to leave the room.

"If I were you, I should take out the present lining before I sent it," said Grace Oakenshaw; "or else, depend upon it, Miss Green will never let you see that good piece of silk again."

"It is so large, Miss Green would make it serve for two bonnets," whispered Cecilia Walters to Caroline.

Agatha half smiled at Grace's remark; she was not naturally at all extravagant, but the piece of thrift which Grace suggested would never have occurred to her mind. However, she did not despise the advice, and as she was not just then particularly inclined for solitude, she returned to the table round which the girls were sitting, and, drawing a chair near Grace, commenced unpicking the lining of the bonnet.

Her unexpected presence was a little restraint upon the party; Caroline and Cecilia let their conversation sink to a whisper, and Grace and Hester, who were older, and too wellbred to do this, only

spoke occasionally. Agatha did not notice anything unusual, and being in a remarkably social humour, she volunteered a sufficient number of remarks herself to prevent an awkward silence, even laughing at her ignorance about her present employment, and rather enjoying Grace Oakenshaw's astonishment at her appeals for information as to which pieces of trimming it was necessary to remove.

"Oh, dear," said Hester, leaning back on her chair, and surveying her drawing in a very dissatisfied manner, "I am sure those lights are all wrong; I wish Agatha you would tell me whether it is possible for a light to fall in this way?"

"Why do you ask me?" said Agatha, rising, however, and going round the table to look at the drawing. "You know I do not draw."

"Yes, I know that," said Hester; "but I have noticed that you know a great deal about drawing, and also that you observe things very closely; and I feel quite sure that you can tell me how to manage these lights and shadows."

Hester was right: Agatha quickly detected the errors of the drawing, and advised the best way to rectify them. As she returned to her seat, Cecilia Walters said—

"Don't you really draw, Miss Marchmont? I quite fancied you did."

"What made you think so?" asked Agatha, rather sharply.

“Oh! I don't know exactly; but when people have not a taste for music, they often have for drawing, and you neither play nor sing.”

“It does not follow, on that account, that Agatha should have no taste for music,” said Hester, rather severely.

Agatha replied to Cecilia.

“Wonderful as it may seem, you were wrong, you see; I neither play, nor sing, nor draw, nor dance, nor do anything that an accomplished young lady should do.”

There was a latent sarcasm in the speech that entirely took away Cecilia's power to reply, and a rather ominous silence ensued. It was broken by Grace Oakenshaw, who, taking up a newspaper that was on the table, said to Hester—

“I have not told you that Katharine and I found out, after breakfast, the reason why mamma sent me this newspaper to-day. There is a long account in it of the Foxton bazaar.”

“Oh, read it aloud, please,” said Hester; “I cannot look at it now.”

Grace looked at Agatha, as if to ascertain if she approved of the proceeding, but she could not read anything in her countenance, and then saying to herself that after all it was ridiculous to use so much ceremony with one who was merely a girl like herself, she turned to the paragraph, and commenced reading an account of the grand bazaar at Foxton,

held in aid of the new church of St. Nicholas, which was still incomplete from want of funds. Agatha listened with more interest than she had expected, and she laid down her scissors, and looked up, as Grace read the names of the ladies who had held stalls.

“The most conspicuous stall in the room was held by Miss Burton, the only daughter of Samuel Burton, Esq. of Annersley, the well-known railway capitalist. A number of beautiful and *recherché* articles were arranged with exquisite taste, and most temptingly offered for sale, by the youthful presiding genius of the stall, who was ably assisted by Mademoiselle Latour,” (“That is her French governess,” said Grace, parenthetically,) “some of whose artistic drawings were amongst the greatest attractions of the room. We noticed amongst the visitors a numerous and distinguished party, at present staying at Annersley—Sir Joseph and Lady Bracebridge, Mr. and Lady Emily Trevor, the Honourable Charles Stanhope, Major Cleveland, &c. The hospitable master of the mansion was conspicuous in the throng of purchasers, and we doubt not his *substantial* support added not less to the success of the bazaar than did the grace of his daughter to its ornament,” &c. Agatha took up her scissors again, and bent over her work; the interest of the paragraph was over, so far as she was concerned, but the curl on her lip showed that she had attended

to the last passage. When Grace had finished, Hester said—

“Those are the Burtons your aunt talked about that day at the Grange, I suppose.”

“Yes,” answered Grace: “Mr. Wentworth’s relations.”

“I wonder he was not there,” said Caroline. “I am sure it must be more fun to stay in a grand house like Annersley, full of company too, than to pore over his books with Mr. Manners in that stupid Coverdale parsonage, though indeed I don’t believe he studies very much.”

“There may be an attraction, you know,” said Cecilia Walters, who was beginning to regain her courage.

“I dare say friendship for Mr. Manners is quite sufficient attraction,” said Hester, anxious to keep the conversation apart from anything approaching that girlish spirit of innuendo and foolish teasing which she knew Agatha despised.

“Mr. Manners or Miss Rivers?” said Grace Oakenshaw, lightly.

“Nonsense!” said Hester, quickly. “Mr. Wentworth cares no more for Katharine than he does for any of us.”

Cecilia laughed, and Caroline said,

“Certainly he is quite as attentive to other people, but still one can see things sometimes. I am sure you must have noticed them yourself, Hester, only

as you are Katharine's *confidante*, you don't choose to say."

The sarcastic smile on Agatha's face was becoming more and more marked, and Hester saw it with annoyance.

"Caroline, you are very silly to talk so," she said; "and you might find something better to do than watching Katharine, I think; and as to Mr. Wentworth, it is ridiculous; he walks and talks as much, or more, with Henrietta, or Grace, or—or Agatha, or any one."

"You have driven Miss Marchmont away, Hester," said Grace, after a few minutes; Agatha having, in the interval, collected her bonnet and her ribbons together, and walked out of the room. "Why did you mention her? I am sure she did not like it."

"Merely because I wanted a name, and I could not think of any one else. She could not be offended, for I only mentioned her amongst others, to prove that Mr. Wentworth's attentions were general, and it is quite true: he talks to her as much as any one."

"I allow that," said Grace, "and what is more remarkable she talks to him; he is the only person she seems to care about, and I have often seen her brighten up when he went to speak to her."

Cecilia and Caroline here exchanged whispers, probably having opinions of their own on the last

point. Hester glanced at them, and then said in a low voice to Grace,

“We are encouraging these girls in talking great nonsense: suppose we read something aloud for a change.”

“With all my heart,” said Grace; “you are a wise little thing, Hester; I wish I had half your sense.”

A book was soon found, and Caroline volunteered to read.

The time passed pleasantly enough, till Hester announced that the dinner hour was approaching, and the girls separated and went to their rooms to arrange their dress.

When Hester went into her room, she found, to her surprise, that Katharine was already there, for she did not know that she had returned from Fairfield.

Katharine was sitting by the dressing-table, she had taken off her bonnet, which she was idly dangling by the strings, and she had not proceeded any further with her toilet. Hester could see her face in the glass; it was rather flushed, and a pleased smile just parted her lips. Two or three sprays of jessamine and a damask rose were on the table before her, and a glass of water stood near, containing two more roses, seeming to indicate that she had paused in the business of arranging them.

“Katharine!” said Hester, gently, and Katharine

started like a person awaking suddenly from a dream.

“Oh, Hester! is it you already?”

“Yes: it is almost dinner time: I did not know you had come in.”

“I came the back way,” said Katharine, “by the green lane.”

“But I thought Henrietta was driving you.”

“Henrietta had some calls to make in Fairfield, and I should have been late if I had waited for her, so I walked. Mr. Wentworth was with me.”

“Oh!” said Hester, and paused. By and by she added—

“And did Henrietta and you accomplish your business satisfactorily?”

“Yes, pretty well, I think: we got the promise of plenty of flowers from Morrison’s.”

“These are from Morrison’s garden, I suppose,” said Hester, taking up the flowers that were on the table. “What lovely roses: did you steal them?”

“Mr. Wentworth gave them to me,” said Katharine.

“He was with you at Morrison’s then?”

“We met him at Pearson’s,” said Katharine, playing with the sprays of jessamine; “and Henrietta told him we were going to order some flowers, so he said he would go with us; and afterwards, when Henrietta said she could not bring me home so early, he offered to walk with me.”

Katharine finished putting the flowers in water as she spoke, and then carried the glass to a little table at her side of the room where she kept her ribbon box and one or two books. Hester rather smiled at the decided manner in which she appropriated the flowers, but she made no remark except a warning that there was no time to lose before dinner, and Katharine hastily began to arrange her hair. Presently she said—

“Hester, have you read the account of the Foxton bazaar in Grace’s paper?”

“Grace read it to us,” answered Hester.

“I told Mr. Wentworth we had seen it,” said Katharine, “and the grand history of his cousin’s stall, but I don’t think he quite liked it.”

“I fancy he and his relations don’t get on very well,” said Hester.

“They have not quarrelled though,” said Katharine, “but there seems to be some difference of opinion between his uncle and himself, and he evidently does not approve of all the display they make. He spoke quite affectionately of his cousin; I don’t mean in the way that Mrs. Oakenshaw hinted, but as if she were a younger sister of his; he called her a dear shy little thing, and said he was sure the governess must have done all the selling business at the bazaar. But there is the bell. Oh! Hester, is my hair very untidy?”

Katharine and Hester were the last down-stairs,

and had no further opportunity for private conversation, as Katharine was soon questioned on all sides about the preparations for the *fête champêtre*.

Agatha alone was silent; the social spirit, which appeared to animate her in the morning had entirely vanished, and no one saw much of her during the remainder of the day.

In the evening, when all the others had gone out, Hester and Henry for a ride, and the rest for a walk, Agatha sauntered alone up and down the shrubby walk. She was tired of the company of silly girls who talked in the frivolous manner she had heard in the morning, and she said to herself it was much better not to expose herself to such annoyance. How Mr. Wentworth would be amused if he knew the way in which they spoke of him, and discussed his attentions! how ridiculous to imagine that he was really attracted by Katharine! Of course, he talked to her as he did to the rest of them. Even Hester had been sensible enough to allow that he talked to all alike. Agatha recalled the sentence in which Hester had mentioned her name together with Henrietta Brooke's and Grace Oakenshaw's, the colour rose slowly to her pale cheeks, and the proud expression in her dark eyes deepened.

What was it that moved her thus? Was she angry at being classed with those whom she half despised, angry at being treated as they were? Was it true that Mr. Wentworth spoke in the same way

to all of them? Did he consider *them* on a par with *her*? It was a mortifying idea; neglect would have been far preferable; and yet a moment ago, Agatha had been condemning those who fancied they saw anything peculiar in Mr. Wentworth's attention to any one; had ridiculed the notion of his preferring Katharine to the rest.

And why should Agatha, the cold, impassive Agatha, trouble herself at all about the question? Ah! Agatha, old and dead in feeling as she imagined herself, was waking to girlish hopes and fears, and the beating, bounding heart of youth was rising within her to assert its claims, so long crushed, and repressed, and despised.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FÊTE AT BRAKELY.

THE fête at Brakely now occupied the attention of every one, and more especially that of Henrietta Brooke. She was continually busy, making arrangements, inviting guests, and rendering the primitive little farm-house habitable. There was no necessity for all the trouble she took; a couple of servants sent over to Brakely the day before the party would have managed the business almost as well as she did, but she chose to busy herself, and was glad of the occupation.

In truth, Miss Brooke was apt to become *ennuyée* at the Grange with no companion but her aunt during the long summer days, particularly when, as was the case at present, she had no flirtation on hand. There was no one in the neighbourhood worth flirting with, in her opinion, with the exception of Mr. Wentworth, and it did not suit her present purpose to flirt with him.

During these days of excitement and preparation Katharine Rivers was her chosen companion and

assistant, so much so that Grace Oakenshaw and others of the home party were inclined to grumble at the way in which she was monopolized by Henrietta.

Katharine could scarcely have had a worse companion at this particular time ; Henrietta called forth all the most defective parts of her character—vanity, self-consciousness, inordinate love of praise, and a slight spirit of contradiction. And yet there was nothing in Henrietta's conversation to offend Katharine's fastidiousness ; she never flattered her openly or repeated the praises of others in a conspicuous manner, but there was a subtle something lurking in her most trifling speeches, which, however sweet it might be at the time, would surely leave behind it seeds of future harm and pain. Katharine, under the delicate insinuations of Henrietta, learnt to weigh the words and looks addressed to her, and to attach importance to what she would otherwise have been slow to notice. It was the evening before the Brakely party. Katharine and Henrietta had gone to the farm-house in the afternoon to make the final arrangements, and it had been settled that they and one of the Grange servants should sleep there. The house looked wonderfully home-like, and presented a great contrast to its unfurnished appearance a week ago. Two rooms down-stairs were fitted up for refreshments and dancing, and though the furniture was, of course, only of a rough, temporary description,

the two girls had succeeded in giving a tasteful look to the whole.

Slight brackets had been placed in the white-washed walls to receive lights, and the common workmanship was concealed by festoons of evergreens. A profusion of plants filled one of the windows, and light muslin draperies supplied the place of window-blinds and curtains. The kitchens also looked as if they had been in regular occupation for a month; and a crowd of substantial and delicate provisions filled the larder for to-morrow's consumption. One of the up-stairs rooms had been prepared for Henrietta and Katharine, and even this looked less forlorn and desolate than might be supposed.

There was something pleasant in the feeling of freedom they had on being left by themselves in this out-of-the-way place, and they went through all their business with great energy and good-humour. When all was completed, they sat down to a rustic supper in the porch, feeling very amicably disposed towards each other, and in a mood to enjoy to the full the novelty of their position.

For some time they talked gaily of the morrow, and congratulated each other on the success of their exertions; but by degrees, after their bouncing attendant had removed the supper tray, and carried the little stand into the house, after the sound of her busy movements in the kitchen had died away,

and her creaking shoes had been heard ascending the staircase, and the house seemed wrapt in perfect quiet ; after the moon had risen, and the long shadows of the trees were cast on the grass, and the air had become so still that the gentle fall of the brook by the mill reached their ears, uninterrupted by any other noise ;—then Henrietta and Katharine's flow of talk dwindled away ; they sat quietly looking out into the night, occupied with their respective thoughts, and as it seemed unwilling to remove from the spot where they were.

Henrietta was the first to break the silence.

“ Katharine, a penny for your thoughts,” she said.

“ I might say the same to you,” said Katharine, rousing herself.

“ We have both been very quiet, certainly,” said Henrietta ; “ and yet, I don't feel inclined to go to bed yet, do you ? ”

“ No, not exactly. It is very pleasant here ; I can scarcely fancy how different it will be to-morrow. Do you know, Henrietta, I often feel when I have been taking a good deal of trouble about any kind of pleasure and anticipating enjoyment, that just before the time comes I do not care about it, and all seems so worthless, all one's preparations so useless, so ‘ much ado about nothing.’ ”

“ I have felt the same myself,” said Henrietta, “ though I dare say you would not give me credit for it ; not that I feel it to-night : I have never

anticipated very much pleasure from our party ; I only like the occupation, and as for you, I do not think that *you* will be disappointed when to-morrow comes."

Katharine made no reply ; she understood the peculiar intonation of Henrietta's voice at the end of the sentence, and though she tried to appear unconscious, little hints of this description were becoming more and more pleasing to her.

"Katharine," said Henrietta, suddenly, after a few moments, "I am going to give you a piece of advice : when you marry, let it be to some one you love ; do not be turned aside by what people say to you about your interest, and prudence, and so forth."

Katharine looked up at Henrietta, and the latter could read in the moonlight the expression of her face.

"You are surprised at my giving you this advice, Katharine ; you have always considered me very worldly, have you not ?"

"Not quite that," said Katharine ; "but you are certainly not a person I should think likely to act upon the advice you have just given me."

"No, not now," said Henrietta, with something like a sigh ; "but you don't know what I might have done once. I am older than you, Katharine, by four or five years" (she was in reality seven-and-twenty) ; "and in four or five years one's ideas

change. Besides, I am differently situated from you. Only a man with money could afford to *think* of marrying me, and I have outlived the romantic age."

"But do you think that people ought to follow their own judgment, and please themselves during the romantic age? I should have thought you would have recommended them to wait till they were older and wiser."

"Wisdom is bitter sometimes," said Henrietta, "and [I should have been happier had I married in my romantic age than I am now, having learnt to be worldly."

"Then you think people who marry early keep their romance, and do not learn worldliness?"

"I think it is so in many cases," said Henrietta; "and I recommend it to you whilst there is time, and also because circumstances are not against you. As for me, I like money, and carriages, and servants, and I must wait till some rich, gouty old man, finds me out."

The last words were spoken in a light, gay tone, which made Katharine almost doubt whether the former part of the conversation had any serious meaning.

"I wonder what my aunt would say to me for giving you such notions?" said Henrietta, after a pause; "they are so decidedly against Philip's cause. Poor Philip! he is very fond of you, Katharine, but you would never be happy with him."

“I am quite sure of that,” said Katharine.

“You do not suit each other in any one thing,” continued Henrietta. “Your husband should be a person fond of poetry and art, and all that sort of thing, about which Philip does not care a straw. You could never be happy with a person who was only kind and affectionate, and did not appreciate properly anything you did, and that you could not look up to, and who could not help you to settle your own opinions and give you just notions and new ideas, and so on. You see I have studied your character, Katharine; I know exactly what you want, and what sort of love would satisfy you better than all Philip’s blundering, blind devotion. Why, if you said black was white, the great stupid fellow would not set you right, but perhaps persuade himself to believe you. Now you don’t care for a senseless attachment like that; you prefer a person who can understand you, even to your failings, who can blame and yet appreciate you: a person you can respect as your superior in intellect. You are very silent, little Katharine, but I know you are thinking of some one who answers to my description in your mind.”

“Oh, stop! don’t talk such nonsense, Henrietta,” said Katharine, faintly.

Henrietta only laughed.

“I have used my eyes since I have been at the Grange this time, and I can see who will be a for-

midable rival to Philip, and I can see how he would annihilate Philip with his looks if he could, when he attempts any of his *petits soins* under his mother's encouragement. Oh, auntie! what would she say if she heard me! but I cannot help telling you my opinion, Katharine."

Katharine rose hastily, but not in a displeased manner.

"Let us go to bed now, Henrietta. And really you should not talk so."

Henrietta smiled, but she too rose from her seat, and they went into the house together, carefully locked and bolted the doors, remembering their condition as "unprotected females," and then went up-stairs to their room.

Katharine was soon in bed and asleep, but Henrietta remained awake for some time. She watched her companion's peaceful face, lighted by the moonbeams, and something like a wish arose within her heart that she could change places with her, cast a veil of oblivion over her years of experience in coquetry and manœuvring, and be again a girl, capable of giving herself up to the freshness and intensity of a first affection. Any one who has in the least degree comprehended the character of Henrietta Brooke will be aware that her behaviour to Katharine at the present time was not without a motive.

Mr. Wentworth had said that she was capable of

driving her aims straight to their completion by the force of her energy and will, and he was partly but not entirely right. Henrietta was by nature a schemer, and in a different rank of life she might have distinguished herself in court and political intrigue; but one stumbling-block lay in her way, and frequently prevented the success of her plans: she could not resist the cravings of vanity, and if the attainment of her object involved any sacrifice of the admiration in which she delighted, all her efforts came to a premature failure. This had occurred once or twice with her best laid schemes, and had it not been for this drawback, Henrietta Brooke would have changed her name long ago.

She had once actually been engaged to a man of considerable wealth and position, who was sufficiently gentlemanly and well-looking to satisfy her taste, and whose twenty or thirty years of seniority was not considered by her as any great disadvantage.

All went smoothly; house and furniture were all arranged, wedding presents poured in daily, and the bridegroom elect became more and more devoted. Henrietta was called a most lucky girl by all her relations, when, alas! in an evil hour the nephew of her intended husband returned from abroad, and was introduced to his future aunt. He was a handsome, dashing young man, but wholly ineligible as a *parti* to one of Henrietta's views.

Nevertheless, she could not resist the temptation of

seeking to captivate him, more especially as he had the reputation of being extremely fastidious. She succeeded ; the nephew plunged into a violent flirtation, and Henrietta was charmed with the novelty of his attentions after the somewhat prosy companionship of her betrothed.

At first, the uncle was unsuspecting ; he had too high an opinion of himself to imagine that Henrietta was marrying him for his money, but he was also extremely *exigeant*, and by degrees he awoke to the fact that his *fiancée*, instead of listening to his speeches, was interpreting the more interesting language of his nephew's eyes. A quarrel was the consequence : Henrietta strove to make peace ; was penitent and submissive, but it was no use ; the uncle was implacable, and refused to venture his happiness with such an atrocious flirt. The nephew was too prudent to marry a portionless girl, however charming and agreeable she might be, and so Henrietta lost both her admirers.

This instance is only one amongst many, in which Henrietta's innate spirit of coquetry and insatiable vanity interfered with the plans of her prudent moments ; and experience did not seem to bring wisdom in its train.

But what scheme had she in view at present ? What made her so sedulously encourage the intimacy between Katharine and Mr. Wentworth ? It was not most assuredly from any wish to bring about a

marriage between them ; that was quite a matter of secondary importance ; but she seized upon their incipient liking to each other, to make it evident to the world, and more particularly to Mrs. Thorpe, that Katharine was decidedly opposed to the match with her cousin Philip.

Not that in preventing this match, Henrietta had any designs upon Philip herself, she simply wished to keep him unmarried so long as she required to make the Grange a sort of home whenever she pleased. A daughter-in-law would have interfered sadly with her influence over her heart, and she instinctively felt that Katharine, though far inferior to her in knowledge of character and tact, would prove a dangerous rival. If ever Philip did marry, one of her own sisters might do worse than take him and the Grange, but for the present she preferred having her influence there undivided and undisputed.

But at last Henrietta's musings came to an end for the night, and she sank into a sleep almost as sound and calm as Katharine's. A soft gray dawn ushered in the next morning, bearing promise of a glorious day, and at an early hour the temporary denizens of Brakely Farm were busied with their light, pleasant labours. Katharine, after she had accompanied Henrietta on a tour of inspection, and pronounced all the arrangements perfect, ran down to the river side, intending to make a sketch of the old mill before it was time to expect the arrival of

the guests. She was so long, however, in choosing a spot for her sketch, that she had only just commenced it when Henrietta came to seek her.

“Really, Katharine, you must come in, and change your dress, unless you mean to appear in that shabby old gingham.”

Katharine looked up and saw Henrietta already attired in a costume of faultless elegance, and yet having nothing out of character with a rustic picnic. She had certainly no wish to appear by her side in the decidedly plain morning dress which she had worn whilst busy with her preparations for the fête, so she closed her sketch-book, and hastened to the house as promptly as Henrietta could desire. She was not at all too early; by the time her pretty, well-fitting muslin dress had been adjusted by Henrietta’s nimble hands, the sound of carriage wheels was heard, and in a few minutes the temporary hostesses had welcomed their guests.

The party was a large one for Fairfield; Henrietta had insisted that everybody should be invited; everybody meaning, of course, only those who were young enough and active enough to care about a picnic. And everybody seemed in good humour and good looks; even Agatha looked unlike herself, and struck Katharine with surprise at the first glance. She had discarded her heavy masses of crape, because the weather was so hot, she said, and she appeared in the bonnet which had been altered ac-

according to Hester's suggestion. She also wore a new dress, with the faintest possible indications of white about the throat and wrists, a trifling but certainly very becoming change from her usual costume, and which appeared to involve a corresponding change in her manner and countenance. Assuredly none of the present party had seen Agatha so agreeable before.

"Henrietta, what has become of Katharine?" asked Mrs. Thorpe, some time after the visitors had assembled, and when most people were collected in little groups at various distances from the house.

"How can I tell, my dear aunt?" returned Henrietta. "Don't you see how everybody wanders about, and how people who like each other cluster together? It always is so at picnics: I suppose Katharine is rambling in the woods with some one or other."

Mrs. Thorpe did not answer, but she was very sure that "some one or other" did not mean Philip. There he was, standing under a large chesnut-tree, and looking as if he did not quite know what he had come to Brakely to do. The person nearest to him was Agatha Marchmont, also solitary and unoccupied, but looking altogether more satisfied than he did.

Mrs. Thorpe turned away to seek Katharine elsewhere, and when she returned from her fruitless expedition, Agatha and Philip had approached each other.

Philip did not speak for some time, but at length,

with a start, he seemed to become aware of Agatha's presence, and with an unusual attempt at politeness, he said—

“Would you like a seat, Miss Marchmont? There is a good block of wood under this tree.”

Agatha came forward almost mechanically, and accepted his offer, and presently rousing herself from her abstraction, she said—

“This is better than anything I have seen since I left Greymore.”

“What is?” asked Philip, looking round him.

Agatha turned her large eyes on him, full of contempt. She did not speak, but pointed to the view before them.

The tree under which they were was one of a cluster, on a piece of rising ground just above the farm-house. Immediately beneath, was the level sward in front of the building, and sloping from that, a thickly wooded bank leading down to the little brawling stream, which was visible at intervals. On the other side, the stream was bordered by low but picturesque rocks, beyond which stretched a bleak, bare-looking moor. In the curve of the stream, at a little distance, the fall of the mill could be seen, and the gray old walls of the mill-house peeped out amongst the trees.

Philip understood both Agatha's admiration and her contempt. His stupid question had been uttered simply from absence of mind, and he felt a little vexed

that Agatha should interpret it in the way she evidently did—as an indication of indifference to beauty. But it did not matter ; she was only like the rest ; she judged him by his undemonstrative manner and ineloquent speech, and gave him credit for no more taste or sensibility than he showed.

He made no reply, and Agatha, struck by his silence, turned to look at him. Something in his countenance impressed her : there was in it an indefinable expression of power, of resolution, of defiance for the opinion of others, which struck a kindred chord in Agatha's breast. It became clear to her, that this man was no subject for her scorn ; if she gave it to him, he paid it back with interest. Involuntarily she succumbed to what she felt was a master mind : rude and unpolished as she might deem Philip, she yet must acknowledge in him a force of will and intellect equal to her own.

The impression was made in a moment, and apparently effaced as speedily. Agatha even smiled at her folly a few minutes afterwards, when Philip assumed his usual manner ; but still that sudden transitory increase of respect for him had an unconscious influence over her, and somewhat modified in future her way of treating him. At present, she took refuge in a silence as profound as his own, till she was called away by the kind Miss Penrose, who on this day renewed her attempts at making herself agreeable to Agatha. She was not again left in

solitude, and she scarcely desired it; she was beginning to find amusement, if nothing more, in watching others, and occasionally discerning marks of character, and so long as she was not bored by the chattering of the two school-girls, Caroline and Cecilia, she could tolerate everything else.

Luncheon was soon the most engrossing affair with everybody; it was spread on the smooth green platform beneath the hillock with the chesnut-trees, and though rather too precise and well-appointed for a picnic, it was nevertheless highly satisfactory. One or two junior members of the party did, indeed, complain that it was not such fun as a more scrambling concern, and recurred with pleasure to some picnic which had taken place last year when the knives and forks had been forgotten, and they had been compelled to carve with pen-knives, and to use pieces of bread and sticks as forks, and "manage anyhow," as Caroline said. But most people appeared to think the present kind of arrangement a decided improvement upon any such primitive proceedings.

Katharine, like every one else, drew up to the appointed spot at luncheon-time, and when she appeared, Henrietta, who was busy helping Mrs. Thorpe to arrange the table, or rather table-cloth, said in the most natural manner,

"Oh! aunt, you were asking for Katharine; there she is."

Mrs. Thorpe looked up. It was true enough, Katharine was there, and not unaccompanied. Mr. Wentworth was with her, and they were leisurely walking up a path which led from the wooded bank. Katharine was looking remarkably beaming and pleasant, almost pretty in fact; she had taken off her bonnet, and was merely shading her head with a parasol. The discarded bonnet was dangling by its strings from the hand of Mr. Wentworth, who, also looking extremely bright and animated, was evidently carrying on with her a very earnest conversation.

And Philip, where was he? Still in his place under the chesnut-tree, and only leaving it when his mother called to him to know whether he intended to come to luncheon.

There was a total absence of form in the way people arranged themselves, and contrary to his usual custom on such occasions, Mr. Wentworth secured the seat next to Katharine's. Agatha by chance sat on his other side, and he talked pretty equally to the two sisters. But still there was enough to alarm Mrs. Thorpe: she had not entirely forgotten her own young days, and she could discover a hundred tell-tale symptoms between him and Katharine, of which there were no traces as regarded Agatha. Agatha might indeed brighten perceptibly, and speak and listen with unusual interest, when Mr. Wentworth addressed her, but between the other two there were glances exchanged, unconsciously perhaps, which

spoke to experienced eyes of an unmistakeable sympathy and a mutual understanding.

Henrietta was not inattentive to what was going on; she followed the direction of her aunt's eyes, and rejoiced to think that she must now become aware how little chance there was that Philip would win Katharine's affection. And yet Henrietta's feelings were mixed; this party, about which she had taken so much thought and trouble, was a dull and wearisome affair to her. What did she care for the dreary small talk of Mr. Lorton, who was bent on being agreeable to her? What amusement was it to her to draw the Elsley boys into conversation? Henry Rivers too, a mere lad, had constituted himself her *preux chevalier* for the time, but what gratification could she find in his boyish devotion? *It* might amuse her sometimes in an idle hour, when she was tired of sitting alone at the Grange, but on an occasion of pleasure like this, when the facilities for flirtation were so great, it could not satisfy her.

Mr. Wentworth was the only person present with whom she had any wish to talk; Mr. Manners, though gentlemanly-looking and agreeable, was too grave, and was known to be engaged. Not that the latter circumstance would in ordinary cases have prevented Henrietta from trying to captivate him, but he was so peculiarly unflirtable a person, that she felt assured the experiment would not answer.

But Mr. Wentworth!—so lively, clever, so universally fascinating, it seemed too hard to give him up exclusively to Katharine, and to renounce the excitement of making the conquest her own.

However, she determined to persevere a little longer; Philip's hopes respecting Katharine must be crushed, and at present there seemed no way so effectual as an apparent attachment between her and another person. For though Henrietta might have depended upon Katharine's rejection of Philip, if he did propose to her, she did not like to allow matters to proceed to such an extremity, feeling that all the weight of family influence, which would be brought forward in favour of Philip, might in time weaken Katharine's resolution.

Henrietta had been indulging in musings of this nature, whilst apparently listening to a prosy story from Mr. Lorton, and, after bestowing upon him the proper amount of smiles, and "indeeds," and animated glances, she turned to speak to Mrs. James Thorpe, who had already appealed to her attention by a slight pressure of her arm.

"Well, Sophia, what is it?" asked Henrietta.

"Look opposite," was the answer.

"Yes; I know," returned Henrietta; "I have been watching them for some time."

"Them!" exclaimed Mrs. James Thorpe; "I don't mean Katharine and Mr. Wentworth, I mean Miss Marchmont. Don't you see how eagerly she watches

for Mr. Wentworth's attention—she who is so proud and reserved to all of us ? ”

“ She seems to like him, certainly.”

“ Depend upon it, she is violently in love with him,” said Sophia. “ Those quiet stiff sort of people always do the silliest things ; and I dare say she thinks herself sure of him, as she is Miss Marchmont of Greymore, and has a little money. I declare she looks quite ill-natured at Katharine, when she says anything to draw him away.”

“ Oh, I cannot see all that you do,” said Henrietta ; “ I only see that Miss Marchmont likes talking to Mr. Wentworth, which is natural enough, as he is more agreeable than most people, but I do not think that she has any idea of interfering between him and Katharine.”

“ I don't know that,” returned Sophia ; “ sisters are often the bitterest rivals ; besides, they are only half-sisters, and I am sure that Agatha Marchmont cares for none of the family any more than if they were perfect strangers. Well, it will be rather an amusement to watch them.”

“ I don't agree with you, Sophia,” said Henrietta. “ I could not bear to see any one interfering with my dear little Katharine, so happy as she looks now ! —and really they make a nice-looking pair, don't they ? ”

Mrs. James Thorpe looked at Henrietta with a puzzled expression, which frequently came over her

face, when she could not understand how far the latter was sincere; but she could discover nothing in Henrietta's placid, smiling countenance, and with a little toss of her head and jerk of her shoulders, she said—

“Well, I never can call Katharine good-looking; she has not a single good feature in her face, and as to Mr. Wentworth, he is rather an elegant person certainly, but he does not strike me as a sincere one, and we know nothing about him after all. I should be sorry to see one of my sisters so soon led away by a perfect stranger as Katharine Rivers is.”

Henrietta smiled, but Mrs. James Thorpe could read nothing decided in the smile, and she turned away with a rather uncomfortable feeling, to talk to some one else. In “point of fact” pretty, pouting, self-satisfied Mrs. James Thorpe was no match for Henrietta Brooke in a war of words. The stronger nature could read the weaker one thoroughly, whilst the weaker remained almost entirely in the dark.

Meantime the luncheon had come to a close, and the three whose demeanour had excited so much attention had withdrawn a little higher up the bank, and more under the shade of the trees. Others had made similar movements, and the party was broken up into little detached groups.

Caroline, Cecilia Walters, and a few more girls

were sitting together at a short distance from Mr. Wentworth and the two sisters, and their peals of laughter were very audible.

At length Mr. Wentworth, who happened to look towards them, was attracted by some mysterious proceeding going on, and he called out to Caroline—

“What divinations are you performing there? Pray, explain them.”

Caroline was in the act of solemnly waving a piece of fruit-paring round her head, and she did not reply until she had done this three times, and completed the ceremony by throwing the strip over her left shoulder. She then looked round, and after exclaiming—

“Oh! it is an S, I declare,” commenced in a confidential whispering with Cecilia. “Oh, nonsense, I would not have him for the world!” she said aloud, and then deigned to answer Mr. Wentworth’s question. “Oh! Mr. Wentworth, do you mean you really don’t know what we are doing? I thought everybody knew this charm. You cut an apple-paring, or any kind of paring will do, in a single strip; then you twirl it three times round your head and throw it over your left shoulder, and it forms the first letter of your husband’s name.”

“Or your wife’s, I suppose, as the case may be,” said Mr. Wentworth.

“I don’t know,” said Caroline, laughing, “for gentlemen don’t change their names, and this means

that you see the first letter of your own future name."

"It does not concern gentlemen at all," said Cecilia.

"Well, I vote we all try it notwithstanding," said Mr. Wentworth, looking round the little circle that had collected 'by this time; "here is a basket of plums, I suppose they will do as well as anything else?"

"We have all tried it," said Cecilia.

"Not Miss Oakenshaw, I am sure; she is looking so anxious. Shall I pare one of these plums for you?" asked Mr. Wentworth, turning to Grace.

She smiled.

"That would spoil the charm, I believe; but I will do it for myself, as you think I am so anxious;" and Grace took a plum from the basket and went through the mystic rite with due solemnity. About the letter formed by the curled strip there were various opinions, and Fanny put a stop to further discussion, by saying—

"You may call the letter what you like, but I think they are always S's, and it is only fancy when you think you see any others. You can just see anything you wish to see."

"I am inclined to think there is great wisdom and justice in that remark, Miss Fanny," said Mr. Wentworth, in a very deferential manner; "but still, we may as well make some further trials."

Several more plums were pared, and several more letters disputed upon, and, in her turn, Katharine too made trial of the charm. Mr. Wentworth stood by her, and seemed to watch the proceeding with great interest. Katharine laughed as she went through the ceremony, but looked round with a little curiosity to see the result. Almost before she saw the letter she heard Henrietta Brooke exclaim—

“It is a W, and quite perfectly formed.”

Why did Katharine perversely blush at that moment, and in her confusion eagerly contradict Henrietta?

“Oh, no; it is an M,” she said; “you are reading it upside down, Henrietta.”

“Who is to decide which is the right way of reading it?” said Mr. Wentworth, laughing, as some of the younger girls drew near to dispute on the rival claims of M and W.

Katharine drew back, and was walking away rather vexed with herself for being so foolishly conscious, when Mr. Wentworth said, in a low voice—

“Might not the letter stand for a Christian name as well as a surname?”

There was nothing peculiar in his way of speaking, yet Katharine felt sure that he did not intend any one but her to hear his words. Whether he meant anything personal was extremely doubtful, but still she could not help remembering that his Christian name was Marmaduke. She was more

than ever annoyed with herself; she had never applied things so foolishly before; it must have been Henrietta's wild talk last night that had put such ideas into her head. Surely, surely, he did not see that she attached any meaning to his words.

Happily for Katharine, all attention was at this moment turned from her, by a rash proposition made by some one that Miss Marchmont should try the charm.

"I!" exclaimed Agatha, with such a start as a Quakeress might give on being asked to dance a polka; and she declined the offered plum without a word.

"I am afraid you disapprove of our little superstitions," said Miss Penrose, who was next her.

"Oh, no," returned Agatha—"not at all, for those who can take interest in them; but it cannot possibly be any object to me to question the future in this way."

"Oh! that is what all you young ladies say," said Mrs. James Thorpe, who had overheard the last speech. "I know what it means very well; you all say you will be old maids till the proper person arrives."

Agatha vouchsafed no particular answer to Sophia, but, as if to justify herself against the charge of speaking like a commonplace young lady, she said, slightly turning to Miss Penrose—

"I did not say I intended to be an old maid, but

I meant that nothing could induce me to change my name."

Mrs. James Thorpe looked mystified for a moment, but a sudden light burst upon her and Miss Penrose at once, and they exclaimed respectively :

"Oh, to be sure, you would expect your husband to become a Marchmont."

"Of course you would not like to part with such an old name."

Agatha said nothing more, but she drew up her neck proudly, and there was an annoyed expression in her face, at having thus exposed one of her cherished feelings to the public gaze. She rose to walk away, anxious to escape any further comments on the revered Marchmont name, and her own private sentiments ; and in doing so, her eye fell on two gentlemen, who had evidently been observers of this little scene. They were Marmaduke Wentworth and Philip Thorpe ; the face of the former expressed a certain degree of sympathy with her ; at any rate, the sort of smile with which he met her gaze showed that he comprehended her. Philip's lip, on the contrary, was curled with unmistakeable disdain, and an incredulous light gleamed in his cold blue eyes. Agatha little heeded Philip's opinion, but his present expression recalled to her mind the one that had struck her in the evening under the chesnut-tree. It was with a feeling of relief that she acceded to Mr. Wentworth's proposition to walk towards the stream,

and as they proceeded silently along, she was able to subdue the little annoyance which the last few minutes had caused her.

They had only walked a short distance when they encountered Katharine, and Agatha was too much pre-occupied to notice that Mr. Wentworth had evidently expected her to join them. Katharine had her sketch-book in her hand, and had been to the house to seek it.

"I have persuaded Miss Marchmont to walk down to the stream," said Mr. Wentworth, as she came up; "I hope you mean to take your sketch from a nice shady place, where one may rest in peace whilst you are drawing."

"I did not ask you to come, remember," said Katharine, gaily, "and I cannot be responsible for your enjoyment; indeed, I think people are best alone when they are sketching."

"What are you going to sketch?" asked Agatha.

"Oh, the mill and the stream, of course. I was so long choosing a spot this morning before you arrived that I had only time just to commence my drawing, or I would not have obtruded my sketch-book this afternoon. And you must know, Mr. Wentworth, that it is rather a bold thing to venture upon a sketch before Agatha; she does not approve of such things."

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Wentworth. "I am sure Miss Marchmont is fond of art."

“Of art, yes; of bungling, no,” said Katharine, with a laugh; “she thinks it very presumptuous in me to sketch; don’t you, Agatha?”

Agatha half smiled.

“No; I don’t think you are presumptuous, Katharine; and it is all very well if you can be satisfied and amused. I only mean that I could never find any satisfaction in drawing myself. But there is a lovely view from this place; I suppose this is the spot you have chosen,” she added, as they reached a flat, smooth rock, projecting into the stream, and overshadowed by some weeping birches on the bank above.

“Yes,” said Katharine; “and these blocks of stone make capital seats. I can hardly understand you, Agatha,” she added, a minute afterwards, when they had comfortably established themselves and she had opened her sketch-book, “you can find out the best spot for a sketch, and you are an excellent critic, and by following your advice Hester and I always improve our drawings, and yet you will not draw, any more than you will play.”

“The dissatisfaction with anything short of perfection, I suppose,” said Mr. Wentworth.

Agatha raised her eyes to his for a moment; he had completely entered into her thoughts, but she did not answer in words.

“I think you are wrong though,” added Mr.

Wentworth; "nothing would ever be done if all thought like you."

"That is what I say," said Katharine, eagerly, "and I cannot see why we should not all of us try to do the very highest of which we are capable, though, of course, we must expect many failures. You should not think, Agatha, that because we draw and play, we are satisfied with what we do, but there is a pleasure, to my mind, in continual attempts and continual strivings."

"I could not bear the continual failures," said Agatha.

"But you can always try again," said Katharine, "and there is always the possibility of moderate success."

"And failure is almost a necessary condition of our existence," said Mr. Wentworth; "to carry the argument into higher matters, when would anything great or useful be done, if we were not nerved to bear many and successive failures?"

"You may be right," said Agatha, "but I do not see any occasion for carrying out the principle where simple gratification is concerned. It gratifies Katharine to make drawings, and to try each time to produce something nearer perfection, and she is not discouraged by repeated failures; it gratifies me, on the contrary, to look on all the perfection I can, either in art or nature, and not to expose myself to

the mortification of fruitless attempts to reach it myself. We are both contented in our own way," and Agatha closed the subject in her usual style.

Katharine was not quite satisfied ; she would willingly have heard some further opinions from Mr. Wentworth, but as Agatha seemed bent upon dismissing the subject, she determined to recur to it with him at some future time ; she now turned all her attention to her sketch, saying—

" Well, I think I must be very daring indeed to go on when such discouraging remarks are daily uttered before me. I suppose my innate conceit supports me ;" and she looked up with the frank, sweet smile, peculiarly her own, which was always irresistibly attractive to Mr. Wentworth.

He replied to it by one of those glances which had excited Mrs. Thorpe's suspicion, and which had been pretty frequently bestowed on Katharine during this day. She continued her drawing with an indefinable sensation of satisfaction, of happiness, listening to the talk between the other two, though rarely joining in it, except when appealed to, or when Mr. Wentworth stooped down to look at her sketch, and make some trifling remark ; trifling in words, but expressing much, from the sort of silent understanding that was growing up between them.

It was a pleasant afternoon to all three ; Agatha spoke more freely than usual, and with rare indica-

tions of her contemptuous manner. Mr. Wentworth was gay and amusing, occasional touches breaking forth of that deeper vein of thought, which made his conversation interesting to those who might otherwise have cared little for the light outworks of fancy and fun which satisfied general observers. And so to three of the party, at least, the picnic proceeded in a sufficiently delightful manner.

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER SONG.—MANŒUVRES.

BRILLIANT moonlight again illuminated the quiet landscape, but the immediate vicinity of the Farm presented a widely different appearance to what it had done the night before, when Henrietta and Katharine sat together in the porch.

To-night there were sounds of gay music and laughter within, and the frequent murmur of more subdued voices without; and light forms flitted through the trees and across the grass.

Everybody said how pleasant it was; and certainly the charm of novelty was very great; the very people who would have been dull and soon wearied had they assembled at Hazel Bank, or the Grange, felt constrained to enjoy themselves in this out-of-the-way place, amidst unusual circumstances.

To Agatha this part of the entertainment was less pleasing than the preceding one; she did not dance, and was rather inclined to look down upon those who liked such a frivolous diversion, and she found herself very much left to her own devices. She wandered

about the garden, or sat in the porch, and her ordinary misanthropic mood was rapidly displacing the more genial one of the earlier portion of the day.

Old remembrances and vivid contrasts were again rising before her, and regrets for Greymore and the past were obscuring her temporary interest in present things.

During a pause between the dances, she was about to re-enter the house, rather from a vague restlessness than any desire to know what was going on inside, when she encountered Philip Thorpe in the porch. As he almost ran against her, he was obliged to make some apology.

"They are trying to get up some singing," he added, "and there are so many excuses I am tired of hearing them."

"Will not any one sing?" asked Agatha.

"I don't know," returned Philip, "and I don't much care what they do, unless Mr. Wentworth sings, and I wanted Henrietta to ask him, but it did not seem to suit her to do so."

"But if you want to hear him," said Agatha, "why do not you ask him yourself?"

"Oh, he is a sort of man to sing much sooner for a girl's asking than mine," said Philip.

"But I thought you did not care for music," said Agatha, rather surprised.

"I care for singing like his," said Philip, "though

I don't know whether the songs he sings are what you call good music or not, but they please me. And so perhaps do some other things that you don't suspect," he added, in a lower tone.

Agatha looked yet more astonished, and Philip caught the expression of her face as her eyes wandered from him to a couple who just then approached the doorway, apparently quite wrapt up in each other. They were Katharine and Mr. Wentworth.

Philip thought he could read Agatha's countenance, and he said, though hardly as if he were addressing the words to her—

"I am not quite so paltry as to deny that a man can sing because——" he paused abruptly, but Agatha understood his meaning.

Philip was jealous, that was evident, but he was not meanly envious, and though Agatha saw no cause to awaken his jealousy, she could not help giving him credit for not allowing it to degenerate into envy.

"I will ask Mr. Wentworth to sing," she said, somewhat abruptly, advancing towards the absorbed pair.

Mr. Wentworth looked rather surprised, but immediately granted her wish, and she returned to the porch to enjoy undisturbed the rare melody of voice which soon reached her ears from the dancing-room. Philip stood listening also; and Agatha was struck with his manner. Was this the man she had con-

sidered so devoid of taste and feeling? Decidedly there were strange contradictions about Philip Thorpe.

The song ended, and dancing recommenced; it was the last polka before supper, and as after supper the party would most likely disperse, this dance seemed to be kept up with more vigour and spirit than any previous one had been. All who could dance exerted themselves thoroughly; Caroline and Cecilia resolutely trying which of them could keep up the longest time.

Others, older and less dancing-mad, retired from the contest, amongst them Katharine, who, though generally an unflagging dancer, appeared at present better contented to stroll in the garden with Mr. Wentworth. The flirtation, or whatever it might be called, had passed beyond the dancing stage with them. They passed Philip and Agatha in the porch, and the latter began at length to wonder—were people right, and was there anything remarkable in the behaviour of these two to each other? Could Mr. Wentworth really care for Katharine?—or did he only dance with her because she was a good partner, and talk with her because she was more agreeable than the other girls? It must be so: dancing and mere agreeable manners were not likely, she felt assured, to win his serious regard. She forgot, or did not do justice to, Katharine's many other claims to notice.

What did it signify to Agatha, after all, how the matter stood?—what could it be to her? Philip Thorpe might, indeed, frown and look gloomy, but why should Agatha Marchmont, proud and indifferent, and wrapt up in the past—why should she wonder and watch? Ah, a strange sudden pang seized Agatha's heart, as her eyes involuntarily followed those two figures across that grass-plot; a bitter question arose before her: Why was Katharine, so inferior as she deemed her, so inconsistent, so trifling, so superficial—why was she perpetually to be winning so much love, whilst she herself seemed fated to be for ever lonely and misunderstood? This was one of Agatha's weak moments, and she speedily summoned her usual self-support and isolated dignity to her aid. Angry with herself for such contemptible feelings, she went into the house, and engaged in conversation to divert the current of her thoughts.

It was now time for supper, and the wanderers in the garden hastened in on hearing the announcement. Nearly all had reached the destined place before Katharine and Mr. Wentworth made their appearance. Henrietta contrived to avoid those who were anxious to lead her to the supper-room, and went into the garden to seek the missing ones. She soon perceived them, walking towards the house, and she waited till they came up. Then she said, in a low tone, indescribably full of meaning—

“Every one is going to supper; will you make haste and lead in Miss Rivers, Mr. Wentworth?”

The words were nothing, but the smile and tone gave them an indication which was extremely annoying to Mr. Wentworth. He saw as clearly as possible that Katharine and he were considered inseparables, either engaged, or about to be, and such a view of things startled him. If Henrietta had deliberately proposed to undo the effect of all her previous endeavours, she could not have adopted a more suitable plan: perhaps, she had some such end in view; possibly she was tired of being a spectatress instead of an actress in a game of flirtation; at any rate, when Mr. Wentworth offered his unappropriated arm to her, she smiled most graciously and soon monopolized his whole attention. Katharine walked in silence on the other side; and when they reached the supper table, and there was some difficulty in obtaining seats, she was separated from Henrietta and Mr. Wentworth, who either designedly or by chance kept together.

The whole of Henrietta's battery of charms was now brought forward; she was brilliant, graceful, kind, sympathising, everything that was delightful. She looked handsomer and more animated than she had done all day; in fact, she was now, for the first time, in her own element. Katharine sat in the midst of a stupid set, mechanically smiling and talking, but really preoccupied. She heard Henrietta's

brilliant sallies, and Mr. Wentworth's amused laughs; the animated interchange of airy nothings that went on between them made her smile, and she felt neither irritated nor alarmed. A sweet, deep consciousness was resting in Katharine's heart, and she was not to be disturbed by what was becoming, in the opinion of most persons, a very demonstrative flirtation. Her feelings were at present too fresh and unselfish to give room for either jealousy or wounded vanity. She was in a species of delicious dream, and something much more decided was required to rouse her from it.

After supper, the party broke up; the moon was now shining in full brilliance, and a pleasant drive home promised a suitable conclusion to the day. Katharine and Mr. Wentworth had alluded to this drive once or twice, and always with a sort of understanding that they would enjoy it together.

But such was not the case: it was arranged that Mr. Manners and Mr. Wentworth should proceed in the carriage containing Mrs. Thorpe, Henrietta, and Lucy Grover. The road to the Grange passed the lane which led up to Coverdale Parsonage, so this was considered the most convenient plan.

Katharine went with Grace and Fanny in the pony-carriage, which Henry drove. Mr. Wentworth came up to her as she stood on the door-step, arranged her shawl for her, and then saw her and Fanny comfortably established at the back of the carriage. He had

scarcely time to say "Good bye," before he was summoned by Henrietta to the other carriage. She chose to sit on the driving seat, and gave up her place inside to Mr. Manners; that Mr. Wentworth should sit outside with her, appeared to be an understood thing. From the sounds which reached the ear of those within the carriage, the drive could not have been a dull one.

At the Coverdale turning the two young men alighted, and sauntered leisurely through the short lane, which separated them from their own door.

"A pleasant day it has been," remarked Mr. Wentworth, in a cool unconcerned tone.

Mr. Manners looked at him intently, so intently that Marmaduke laughed.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "You look as grave as if I had said something very serious. It has been a pleasant day, has it not?"

"Yes, certainly. I was only wondering a little how much of you is earnest, and how much assumed."

"You have known me long enough to find out, I should think," said Mr. Wentworth.

"Yes; and yet you have puzzled me to-day. Are you acting without any consideration, or do you mean to marry that girl?"

"I am afraid acting without any consideration and meaning to marry *any* girl would be the same thing; but do you refer to Miss Brooke?"

“No—Miss Rivers; I never imagined for a moment that you thought seriously of Miss Brooke.”

Marmaduke turned rather pale.

“Have I then been so conspicuous in my attention to her? I thought I had been prudence itself, and that my chief flirtation had been with Miss Brooke.”

“You flirted desperately enough with her at supper, but I was not deceived by that, though why you should have recourse to such a measure as a blind I cannot understand. I always thought you a straightforward fellow, Marmaduke: if you are really in love with Miss Rivers, why cannot you boldly propose to her or else leave her alone, and treat her as you do other people.”

“It is very well for you to talk in this way, Manners—you with a living in possession and a better one in prospect. But for me without money, without a profession, I should like to know what Mr. Rivers would say if I asked him for his daughter, even supposing, as you say, that I am in love with her?”

“But you are not without prospects, Wentworth.”

“True! there is my uncle, and I suppose it will end in my binding myself to him, and becoming the machine he would like to make me. But I did not suppose I had given cause for the remarks you have been making. I am sure I have on many occasions avoided Miss Rivers; and there is no fear, I imagine, that any behaviour of mine should en-

danger her peace of mind." The last words were spoken in an inquiring tone, and Mr. Manners could not resist a smile. "I know what you are thinking," said Marmaduke, eagerly; "but I give you my word of honour, that a third person might have heard every word that has passed between us."

"Very possibly; and yet it may be clear as daylight that you are attached to each other. I am not much given to observing such things myself, but I have heard remarks to-day for which you should not give cause, unless the affair is to end seriously. Mrs. James Thorpe, for instance——"

"The meddling little woman! what had she the impertinence to say?"

"Oh! I cannot particularize: she gave several hints that Philip Thorpe's claims were quite set aside, and that you and Miss Rivers were devoted to each other. If for no other reason, you should pause before you allow a steady attachment like Philip Thorpe's to be rejected for your sake."

"I might appeal to himself if I have ever interfered with him," said Mr. Wentworth; "and even you can scarcely say I have not given him opportunity to show as much devotion as he chose."

"I cannot say you have not outwardly, but you are quite aware that there are ways of influencing without—however, it may be of no consequence. Miss Rivers is not a girl to die of a disappointed affection; and I have seen her flirt with people before

you appeared upon the scene." Mr. Wentworth walked on in silence. They had nearly reached the house when Mr. Manners again spoke: "You are not offended at my interference, Marmaduke? I cannot see you acting in this way without asking you to consider. You ought to decide upon something. You either love Miss Rivers, or you do not; it is for you to consider whether you love her sufficiently to sacrifice your present mode of life and accept your uncle's offers. If you do not love her, you should not pay her attentions, which, though they may not be actually dangerous for her peace of mind," and Mr. Manners smiled, "yet make her talked about, which is always a disadvantage to a girl."

"But I maintain that I have not been attentive," said Mr. Wentworth; "and it scarcely seems necessary to adopt at once either extreme of conduct. By your own showing, Miss Rivers is not the sort of girl to fancy every man who speaks to her is in love with her."

Nothing more was said: the two entered the house in silence, and stood lighting their candles in the passage. Marmaduke Wentworth's face was pale, and Mr. Manners knew that he was thinking more than he chose to confess. His last words, as they parted for the night, were light and said with a smile:

"I must try a fresh course, I see: a vigorous

flirtation with Henrietta Brooke will be the best plan. She will not care how much people talk about her, and it will divert attention from—from others. She is far too seasoned a flirt for anything of the kind to affect her.”

Mr. Manners shook his head and smiled rather gravely, and the two separated.

CHAPTER X.

HINTS AND SUSPICIONS.

For some days after the *fête* little occurred to diversify the usual course of life at Hazel Bank, and there were no excitements beyond walks and drives, and occasional visits to Fairfield.

Agatha shut herself up a good deal in her own room to escape the frivolous, girlish chatter which annoyed her so frequently, but yet, if the truth *must* be told, she did not always find amongst her books and papers the distraction for which she hoped.

Agatha's resources were all of one description; studies of a nature rather severe for a woman had hitherto been her delight, and metaphysical investigations and obscure historical researches her favourite employments, involving in their pursuit a considerable acquaintance with three or four languages.

For what is commonly called science she had less taste, and against modern discoveries and modern speculations, especially when made familiar to common understandings, and lowered to an amusing pursuit, she had an invincible prejudice. It might

be well enough for Katharine and Hester to make collections of ferns, and spread out pretty specimens of sea-weeds, and arrange shells on nicely cut cards, and write out long Latin names in neat characters, and fancy themselves botanists and conchologists, and various other ologists, but such shallow play-work did not suit *her* sober mind.

It was the same with accomplishments; a morbid fastidiousness prevented her trying to cultivate the tastes she really possessed, and a want of mechanical facility presented an obstacle in the way to success which she had not patience to surmount.

Now it must be acknowledged that the abstruse studies to which Agatha confined herself, valuable and even delightful as they may be, are not exactly enlivening pursuits when resorted to as a means of passing away time, and as a relief from serious thought. In Agatha's happy days they had been sufficient for her, as she had then many external resources which were now lost to her; the companionship of those she loved, the exertion to make them happy, the consciousness of being an object of importance to all around her, and the power of rambling at will amidst the scenes which best suited the tone of her mind.

Here it was very different: when vexed and irritated by the world without, she flew to some difficult and perplexing study as a relief; and, after making her head ache, perhaps, and losing herself in a laby-

rinth of obscurities, she was obliged to acknowledge her inability to find relaxation and enjoyment.

Thus it often happened that Agatha passed solitary hours in listless thought, or rather musing. She could not perpetually exert her mind to grapple with difficult questions, and lighter pursuits were out of her way.

Dreading to become trifling, she became unoccupied ; and want of occupation is, as every one knows, to a mind naturally earnest and vigorous, a heavy misfortune. Mischief can ever be found for the idle mind, as for the idle hands. The word idle, indeed, ought scarcely to be applied to Agatha. Her mind could not rest inactive, but it had no healthy employment and preyed upon itself. We will not stay with her at present, though a hint at the state of her mind was necessary to explain some of her future actions ; just now, we have more immediate concern with Katharine. Katharine, so buoyant and amiable, throwing so much sunshine around her during this her happy summer, could it be that all her bliss was trembling on one thread, and that she was casting all the treasure of her joyous young existence on one throw ? At present she had not a single fear for the future ; she scarcely thought of it ; she scarcely asked herself if she loved, or was beloved, but she had an exquisite sense of happiness when Marmaduke Wentworth was with her, which no explanation could, at this particular stage, have

improved. It is true the soft, delicate bloom of unconsciousness had been dashed away from Katharine's feelings before now; she had lived too much in a world of rattling girls and gossiping neighbours not to be aware that her own and Mr. Wentworth's proceedings were topics of discussion. And though in his presence this idea seldom recurred to her, and all sensation of vanity was merged in affection, when he was absent, and hints and circumstances recalled it to her mind, it was not displeasing to her.

Poor Katharine! she was young, and Fairfield was her little world, and it was something to her to be praised and envied there, and to have it believed that a fascinating and intellectual man, whom others admired, admired her, and that the notice which others wished to gain was hers.

Poor Katharine! do not judge her harshly; such feelings soon bring their own punishment, and hers was not far distant.

The good people of Fairfield were now chiefly occupied with the prospect of a grand Agricultural Show, the like of which had never been held in Fairfield, for it was the County Show, and —shire was eminently an agricultural county. But connected with the cattle show, there was another of even more importance locally, namely, the first show of the recently established Horticultural Society of Fairfield. Caroline Rivers and Cecilia Walters were delighted to think that these two events would take

place before their return to school; not that they were at all interested in the exhibition of fat cows and sheep, or even, very much so, in that of fruit and flowers, but they enjoyed the idea of the concourse of people that would assemble at Fairfield, and gloried in the anticipation of spending two days in the midst of bustle and confusion.

Mrs. James Thorpe gave a general invitation to the girls at Hazel Bank to spend the two days at her house, as they would thus be able to see all the passers-by, and also, as she graciously intimated to Katharine, assist her and Lucy in entertaining the numerous guests who would be "sure to drop in."

Mrs. Rivers, however, had likewise visions of people "dropping in," and though Hazel Bank was rather too far from the town to render it very probable that they would do so, an elaborate cold luncheon was to be on the table the whole day, on the chance that visitors might arrive, and she also declared that some of the girls must remain at home, at any rate during the first day. The younger ones might please themselves, and go to Fairfield if they liked; but Katharine at least must stay at home, to help in receiving the possible guests. The final arrangement was that Agatha, Katharine, and Grace Oakenshaw should remain at home, and the rest proceed to Mrs. James Thorpe's.

Agatha had never contemplated going, and she stayed behind from her own pleasure, not at her

stepmother's request. Indeed, Mrs. Rivers would almost as soon have thought of flying as of requesting Agatha Marchmont to take any trouble in entertaining company. Katharine and Grace had no particular wish to enter into the confusion at Fairfield, but still they found staying at home rather a *triste* affair, as all their regular employments had been disturbed. They could not settle to anything particular, as they might be interrupted at any moment, and their time was principally passed in the dining-room, sitting nicely dressed, occasionally doing a bit of embroidery, and wandering from the luncheon table to the window to see if any one were coming.

A few stragglers actually did arrive: Mr. Rivers had contrived to waylay too or three country gentlemen who had no other engagements, but no one whom Katharine or Grace considered in the light of society came to Hazel Bank that day.

Evening and quietness came at last; the clatter of carts and people on the road gradually died away; clouds of dust no longer blew over the garden wall and powdered the shining leaves of the laurels and seringa trees. The house, too, was now quiet: Mr. Rivers and Henry had gone to the inevitable dinner, which was to conclude the day's proceedings; the servants had all gained leave of absence on one plea or other, occasions of this kind, emphatically termed "loose times," generally serving as pretexts for getting a holiday; the ladies of the house, having had

tea together, were dispersed in the garden in different directions; Mrs. Rivers was busy looking after the flowers that were to be exhibited to-morrow at the show; Agatha was reading in the summer-house; and Katharine and Grace were pacing the broad walk under the trees, talking as if they had been debarred the exercise of their tongues all day.

“Well, Katharine,” said Grace, in answer to some observation about Henrietta Brooke, “it is all very well for you to stand up for Miss Brooke, as I suppose you consider her a sort of connection; but for my part, I think her very hollow and insincere, and I cannot like her. And though she seems so fond of you, I would not trust her further than I could see. She will play you a bad turn one of these days, if she is not doing it now.”

“But what makes you think so, Grace?”

“Oh, I cannot mention anything particular, but her manner gives me the impression that she is playing with you; I don’t know what she is aiming at, of course, but I should like to know what she means by always teasing you about Mr. Wentworth, and teasing him too, for I have heard her, and yet, whenever she has a chance, monopolizing him herself, and leading him away from you.”

Katharine coloured up to her brow.

“What do you mean, Grace? I never knew that Henrietta teased Mr. Wentworth about me.”

“No, I dare say not; and I dare say you never saw her try to fascinate him away from you?”

“Oh! this is nonsense, Grace,” said Katharine; “of course Mr. Wentworth sometimes chooses to talk with Henrietta, sometimes with me, and sometimes with other people, but it is not right or charitable to conclude that we any of us try to fascinate him; you are making him of too much importance.”

Grace smiled.

“I don’t mean to accuse *you*, dear, of doing such a thing. I believe it is purely of his own will that Mr. Wentworth walks and talks with you, but Henrietta is a different sort of person from you.”

“But, Grace,” said Katharine, after a little pause, “I do not think Henrietta and Mr. Wentworth are so very much together. I know she is considered to be a flirt, but she can scarcely be flirting with him, he so seldom——”

Katharine hesitated.

“He so seldom gives her the chance,” concluded Grace; “yes, you are right. Except the night of the fête I never saw him pay her any attention when you were present, and then it was entirely her doing, I am confident. But, Katharine, I have sometimes seen them together when you were not there, and I am sure if Henrietta were a true friend to you, considering, as she pretends to do, that you and Mr. Wentworth are attached to each other, she would not have acted in the way I have seen her.

It is a curious manner of showing friendship to make every effort to steal away your friend's admirer."

"But you are supposing so many things," said Katharine; "you have no right to conclude that Mr. Wentworth is more my admirer than Henrietta's."

"Now, Katharine, it is no use talking in that way; I must judge from what I see before my eyes."

"Well, allowing the first position," said Katharine, with a nervous little laugh, "what has Henrietta done to make you think her so treacherous?"—and Katharine waited more anxiously than she would have liked to own for Grace's answer.

"I cannot describe exactly what she said and did," returned Grace, "so much depends upon manner in things of that kind; but don't you remember one evening last week, when I went out riding on your pony with Henry?"

"Yes," said Katharine; "you went to the Grange."

"Yes; and we stayed there some time, for your uncle kept Henry about some business. Well, I found Mr. Manners sitting with your aunt, and when I asked for Henrietta I was told she was in the garden. I wandered out to seek her, and found her at last in the dial-garden, sitting on the bench with Mr. Wentworth."

"Really, Grace, I see nothing wonderful in all this," said Katharine.

“No ; there was nothing wonderful, and that is just what I mean by saying that I cannot describe such things ; of course it was natural enough for Henrietta and Mr. Wentworth to stroll into the garden whilst your aunt and Mr. Manners discussed parish matters, and natural enough to sit together on a bench talking ; but if you had seen them, you would have had the same impression that I had.”

“Was Mr. Wentworth so very attentive to Henrietta ?” asked Katharine, again changing colour.

“No ; he seemed pleased enough to talk with her, and I dare say he felt flattered by her manner, but I am convinced he does not care for her really at present. Oh, no ; the flirtation was chiefly on her side : she contrived to make me feel very much *de trop*, and to wish myself back again in the drawing-room. And she put on such an innocent air all the time, like a young girl who did not know what flirting meant ; and she was playing at that German charm with a flower, you know what I mean.”

“*Ich bin geliebt ?*”

“Yes ; and she does not know German, and he had to teach her to pronounce the words, and she screwed her mouth into all sorts of shapes, never ugly ones though, and showed her white teeth, and gave such looks with those large, glittering eyes of hers,

—oh! I was disgusted, Katharine; she had no business to go on in such a way. Can't you see her from what I have told you?"

Katharine certainly could picture to herself pretty clearly the scene which Grace had hinted rather than described, but she only said—

"You are so vague, Grace, and I do not see any reason to condemn Henrietta as deceitful and treacherous. I know she likes talking to gentlemen, and making herself agreeable, and—flirting, perhaps; and of course she is at liberty to do it with Mr. Wentworth as well as with the rest of the world."

There was a slight touch of offended pride in the last words, Katharine was evidently a little hurt, and Grace did not pursue the subject.

A complete diversion was soon made by the arrival of the party from Fairfield, and questions were asked and answered about the events of the day. The younger girls were charmed with having seen so many fresh people, and described them in that style of sharp criticism peculiar to school-girls; how Mr. Such-a-one parted his hair down the middle; and Mrs. So-and-So took off her gloves and rings to draw attention to her white hands; and how it was quite indisputable that the old colonel's marvellous whiskers were dyed. Hester listened very soberly to all these remarks, and did not add many of her own impressions to the general stock.

It had been a tolerably amusing day, but the dust had been disagreeable, when the windows were open covering everything in the room. She had found it a little tiresome to sit all day working and looking out of the window, but she had seen some funny people, and laughed a good deal with Lucy Grover.

Fanny's observations were much more numerous ; she had counted all the horses, cows, carriages, &c., that had passed, and had commenced counting the people, but there were so many she had got confused. From a quiet post in one of the window-seats, she had exercised her powers of observation upon the people who came in to luncheon, and her remarks were considerably more shrewd and pertinent than those of Caroline and Cecilia. Katharine and Grace were soon satisfied with hearing about people they scarcely knew, and in whom they took little interest, but at length names were mentioned which arrested their attention.

"Mr. Wentworth !" repeated Grace ; "I should not have thought him a likely person to go to a cattle-show."

"He came in with uncle James," said Hester. "I don't know whether he had actually been at the show, but he made some nonsensical speeches about finding it impossible to stay quietly at Coverdale when Fairfield was in a state of excitement."

“And he is going again to-morrow, Katharine,” said Fanny.

“Indeed,” said Katharine, “I dare say most people will go to the flower show.”

“But he is going with *us*,” said Caroline. “Aunt Sophia asked him and Mr. Manners to join her party and return to tea in the evening, and we are to have a dance.”

“Mrs. James Thorpe said he would find more attractions to-morrow,” said Cecilia Walters; “it was no use asking him to stay to-day, she said.”

“And Lucy Grover told him he looked disappointed,” said Caroline; “he had expected some one else, she was sure.”

“Well, at any rate there will be a larger party to-morrow,” said Katharine, affecting not to understand any insinuations.

“Oh, but we knew what aunt Sophia meant,” said Caroline, “and she said *attraction*, not attractions, Cecilia.”

“Sophia is more foolish than I thought her,” said Katharine; “and I am sure Mr. Wentworth is the last person in the world to like to hear such nonsense;” here Katharine stopped, feeling that she was making the matter too personal, and assuming herself to be the attraction mentioned.

“Perhaps she meant Henrietta Brooke,” said Caroline, rather maliciously.

“Very likely; come, Fanny, it is time for you to

go to bed, and not stay listening to gossip ;” and Katharine drew her little sister away, leaving the rest to indulge in jokes at her expense.

“ Kitty darling, you don’t mind their teasing,” said Fanny, as her favourite sister bent over her bed to wish her good-night.

“ Oh, no ; of course not. It is all nonsense,” said Katharine ; “ but it is silly to be always reviving poor jokes. I hope you will never get into the same way.”

“ But you don’t believe what Caroline said just now about Miss Brooke,” persisted Fanny.

“ It is of no consequence to me whether it is true or not,” said Katharine, with a grave face.

“ But, Kitty, I am sure Mr. Wentworth does not care a bit for her ; he only loves my darling sister, and I am so fond of him ; and he asked *me*, and not the others, where you were to-day.”

“ Come, come, it is time for you to go to sleep, Fanny ; and such a little girl as you should not think of such things ; give me a kiss, and say good-night.”

But in spite of Katharine’s sage remarks, it was with a brightened countenance that she threw her arms round Fanny, and gave the more than usually affectionate parting kiss.

Can we wonder, when the same name was so continually spoken in her hearing, the same flattering tale so frequently insinuated before her, that

Katharine should give herself up to a delightful dream, and allow herself to fancy, though covering her crimsoned face with her hands at making such an avowal to herself, that, “perhaps he really did care for her?”

CHAPTER XI.

THE FLOWER SHOW.

A HOT, sunny, August morning ushered in the second day of the Fairfield agricultural meeting.

The road between Hazel Bank and the town was white with dust, and the very hedges were scarcely distinguishable. The pony-carriage which contained a portion of the Rivers family was half buried in the dust it raised, and many were the complaints of its inmates, who, with all appliances of large hats, uglies, and parasols, were yet in a fair way to be blinded and stifled. Much more enviable was the condition of those who had preferred the field walk to the dusty drive. They had, at least, shade and quiet, and not till they entered the road just opposite cousin Bessy's cottage, did they become thoroughly aware of the great stir that had been occasioned in Fairfield and its environs by the events of yesterday and to-day. Katharine, who was one of the walking party, fancied that she saw cousin Bessy's head in the parlour window, and she declared that she must

walk across the road just to speak to her; and as, on such a busy day, all her companions preferred entering the town in a body, they did not separate, but all accompanied her, and took the garden by storm.

Even Agatha, though she had no wish to prosecute her acquaintance with Miss Thorpe, followed Katharine, Grace, and Hester across the road.

Cousin Bessy no sooner saw the party approaching than she left her post at the window, and hastened to the door.

“Oh, no; we cannot come in,” said Katharine, in answer to her entreaties; “we promised Sophia that we would go early; besides, the confusion in the town seems increasing every moment, and we must manage to get through it before it becomes any worse.”

“Yes, my dear; you are right enough. It hardly does for girls like you to walk about at a time like this by yourselves. Even Miss Brooke, who is not timid, I am sure, was afraid to go on the road by herself yesterday evening.”

“Miss Brooke!” exclaimed Grace Oakenshaw; “I thought she stayed at the Grange all day to entertain visitors.”

“Yes, my dear; but in the afternoon she got tired, she said, of sitting in the house, so she came to see me a little, and very pleasant she made herself, I will say that for her, she is always good company. She

would not go farther into the town for fear of meeting people."

"But I thought you said she was afraid to walk along the road by herself," said Grace; "how did she manage to come alone from the Grange?"

"Oh, it was early then, but when the time came for her to go back, she got a little frightened—Phœbe had brought in some stories about drunken men at tea-time. Well, we walked about in the garden, and wondered how she was to get home, for there was no chance of seeing your uncle or Philip, as they were at the dinner, and Phœbe would have been no protection, and I did not like to send her for Jacob Jackson, as she must have passed the Crown and Anchor, and you know what a noisy disorderly place it is at such times."

"Well, and how did Henrietta get home?" said Grace, pertinaciously keeping to the point.

"Oh, she told me not to trouble myself, but that if we kept a good look-out from the garden we should most likely see some one she knew, that she could ask to take care of her as far as the Grange fields. And by good luck, I suppose, we had not waited long before that young gentleman that lives with Mr. Manners came in sight."

"Mr. Wentworth!" said Grace.

"Yes; I never can remember names, though I ought to remember his, for I was reading a book about a Wentworth the other day. Well, Miss

Brooke ran to the gate when she saw him; and she spoke to him very prettily, and said how she was afraid of walking on the road alone, and it was very silly of her, for she ought to have thought of it before, but now she had no means of getting protection, would he mind taking charge of her as far as the fields, then she should be quite safe."

"And what did he say?" asked Grace, giving Katharine a meaning look.

"Oh, he was very polite, and said he should be delighted, and it really was unsafe for ladies to walk alone; and then he bowed to me, and Miss Brooke introduced me; and he stayed talking to me whilst she put on her bonnet, and a very agreeable young gentleman he is, and I dare say she enjoyed her walk home."

"I dare say she did," said Grace; "at any rate she made a bold stroke for it."

Agatha, who had been listening to the above little conversation, drew herself up with her haughtiest gesture, and seemed about to express some kind of echo to Grace's remark, but she changed her mind, and did not speak.

"We must go," said Katharine, rather hastily; "come, Grace. Good-bye, cousin Bessy."

"Good-bye, my dears; I shall see you in the afternoon, for I am going to the flower show."

"With us?" inquired Katharine.

"No, not with such a gay young set: I am going

with Mrs. Elsley, but I shall see," cousin Bessy added, rather mischievously, looking at Katharine, "I shall see whether Miss Brooke keeps her *beau* to-day."

Katharine blushed slightly, and after another hasty good-bye, followed the others through the garden.

They reached their destination without any unpleasant encounters, and were soon established at Mr. James Thorpe's, in the dining-room which faced the street, most of them within a convenient distance of the windows.

Katharine was not above being amused with the variety in the passers-by, and the frequent little traits of character which were exhibited amongst them, but by-and-by she began to tire of the observations of her companions, the flippant speeches which passed for satire, and the nonsensical conjectures which were hazarded about everybody's position and concerns.

Agatha's quiet sneer annoyed her, and doubly so, because she felt that there was some cause for it. In vain did she try to lead the conversation into a different channel, but it was a hopeless task, in the presence of a pert, conceited, worldly Mrs. James Thorpe, a simple, rattling Lucy Grover, and two forward chattering school-girls.

Only a few stragglers made their appearance; the grand day of the cattle show was over, and the flower

show was not to commence before the afternoon, so that just now visitors were rare, though there was not much cessation of the noise and confusion out of doors. It was a relief to sit down to luncheon, and talk about the expected flower show.

“I wonder Henrietta Brooke has not arrived,” said Mrs. James Thorpe. “She promised to come early. Listen, girls, is not that the Grange pony-carriage?”

It was a false alarm. Fanny ran to the window to look, but there was no pony-carriage, only a dog-cart, and it passed the house. Presently, however, a long and loud rat-tat at the door almost caused the party to jump from their seats, and this time Henrietta's near presence was indisputable, as she always announced herself in the like decided and noisy manner. In the general start, a peculiar start of Katharine's was not observed, which was occasioned, not by the loud knock of Miss Brooke, but by the sight of a well-known, slight, gentlemanly figure, which just then passed the window. Katharine was quick at drawing inferences; Mr. Wentworth must have passed the door where Henrietta was standing; why, then, did he not enter, engaged as he was to accompany Mrs. James Thorpe's party to the flower show? Something seemed to tell her that he and Henrietta had not first met at the door-step; perhaps he had been walking with her,—why, then, did he not come in at the same time?

This question was unanswered when Henrietta entered the room, smiling and gracious, and plausible as usual—Katharine thought even more *plausible* than usual—and some of the remarks made by Grace Oakenshaw the night before flitted through her mind. An indefinite sensation of some evil fascination lurking in Henrietta's glittering eyes came over her, and she turned away half shrinking from the cordial pressure of her hand.

"Have you walked all the way from the Grange?" inquired Lucy Grover, in some surprise, glancing at Henrietta's delicate costume, which was ill-fitted for a walk in the dusty road: from the fragile, transparent bonnet, which rested lightly on her carefully arranged hair, to the neat and spotless delicate boots, which covered her well-formed, but by no means fairy-like feet.

"Oh, no," said Henrietta; "I drove up to the Black Bull and then sent the pony-carriage back to Mrs. Elsley's for my aunt. They are going with Miss Bessy Thorpe to the flower show."

"Well, sit down and have some luncheon, Henrietta," said Mrs. James Thorpe.

"Thank you, no; I had luncheon, or rather dinner, with my aunt before we started; so go on, good people, and I will look out of the window and see the doings."

And so saying, Henrietta stationed herself in a window recess near enough to see everything in

the street, though sufficiently within the shadow of the curtains to escape observation herself; and, from time to time her friends at the table were entertained with her merry laugh and critical remarks upon all the passing figures and equipages. Katharine, from some cause or other, found Henrietta's sparkling speeches more ill-natured than she had ever done before, and thought that they betrayed a lower tone of mind.

Every unfortunate peculiarity of person or movement, every accident of dress or behaviour that implied poverty or a struggle with the world, was unmercifully quizzed; and to hear Henrietta's severe judgments and mocking laugh, you would imagine, that in her estimation everything was mean and worthless that did not reach a certain standard of outside show and glitter.

For the moment, Katharine felt this as keenly as Agatha did, and she wondered that she had so often tolerated, nay, applauded and encouraged, Henrietta's satire. Her cheek flushed with indignation now, but she had no words to refute what she heard. A diversion was shortly made by the entrance of Mr. James Thorpe, Henry Rivers, and one or two more gentlemen, who wanted luncheon, and soon afterwards Mrs. James Thorpe announced that it was time to get ready for the flower show.

"Your mamma will be here directly, I suppose?" she said, turning to Katharine; "and she will ex-

pect us to be ready. I wonder whether Mr. Manners and Mr. Wentworth will come here or join us at the field ? ”

“ They are coming here,” said Henrietta. “ I saw Mr. Wentworth in the town, and he told me he was going to look for Mr. Manners and then they were coming.”

“ I wonder whether he came to meet Henrietta at the Black Bull,” whispered Grace to Katharine, as they went out of the room. “ She was likely enough to tell him last night that she could not walk through the streets by herself.”

“ Nonsense,” said Katharine, but Grace’s words pained her notwithstanding. She was growing suspicious, and she was beginning to dread being made a dupe by Henrietta. Angry with herself for such feelings, she could not yet cast them from her.

With nervous agitation she stood before the glass tying her bonnet-strings ; it seemed to her that this bonnet, which she had formerly considered a pretty one, had never looked so unbecoming before. She thought herself pale, cold, shadowy, insignificant ; she gave a moment’s remembrance to the bright, glowing face she had left down-stairs, the perfect toilette, the commanding figure, the nameless air which bespoke universal attention, and then she shrank into herself with a sort of half-sigh, and resigned movement, very unlike her usual demeanour.

Arrivals had taken place during the absence of the

girls up-stairs; Mrs. Rivers had just driven up, and Mr. Manners and Mr. Wentworth were established in the dining-room, and the whole party were only waiting for the arrival of Mr. Rivers, who had most of the tickets of admission in his pocket, to start immediately to the flower show. Katharine shook hands with the two gentlemen, and then moved away to a retired corner of the room, rather touchily anxious to avoid the slightest appearance of wishing to interrupt Mr. Wentworth and Henrietta, who, when she entered, were engaged in an animated conversation. But though half screened from observation herself by a corner of the piano, and apparently occupied in the examination of a new piece of music, she did not lose a single gesture of either of them; and, unused to watching or suspicion of any kind, she was not careful to conceal the changing expression of her face.

The piece of music might be in her hand, but her eyes soon ceased to grant it any attention, and a superficial observer would easily have discovered the course of her thoughts.

The only person in the room, however, who noticed her was about the last whom she would have imagined likely to do so—her brother Henry. But the truth was that he had himself an interest in watching the flirtation which appeared to be going on. Poor boy! he had been flattered at being allowed to dance attendance upon a handsome young woman like Hen-

rietta Brooke, and now he found himself cast on one side. It was a rather bitter, but a wholesome discipline, and might perhaps aid better than any other in turning the clever, conceited youth into the vigorous, earnest-minded man; but at present its effects seemed to be a little of the souring order.

Angry with Mr. Wentworth for monopolizing his divinity, he began to wonder why he could not go and talk to Katharine as usual, and then, by a natural connection of ideas, he turned to see what Katharine was doing.

There she was, in the corner by the piano; her eyes fixed on the pair whom he had been observing; her face paler than usual, her lips compressed, her whole being penetrated by one steady interest. Then Henry began to think that Katharine had really cared for "that fellow Wentworth's foolish speeches," and to take a sort of perverse pleasure in seeing her annoyed in the same way as himself. So he walked up to her, and in a rather irritated and decidedly irritating tone, commenced bantering her, by way of relieving his own feelings.

"Katharine, for goodness sake, take your eyes off those two; they see what you are about, and will laugh at you famously."

"What do you mean, Henry?" said Katharine, starting a little, but contriving, nevertheless, to speak with some semblance of dignity.

"I mean that you are letting your friend Mr.

Wentworth see that you had rather he talked with you than with Miss Brooke, and that she sees it too, and is laughing at you."

"Henry!" exclaimed Katharine, her cheeks turning crimson, and an angry light flashing from her eyes, "how can you speak in this way to me? Really, there should be some limit to your teasing."

Henry felt that, in truth, he had no right to speak so bluntly, but he was in a bad temper, and he only returned a sullen smile. Almost at this moment an accidental circumstance seemed to prove that he was right in his conjectures; Henrietta turned her eyes towards the place where Katharine was sitting, and immediately made some observation to Mr. Wentworth. Her smile was mocking; and it was easy to imagine that the one which returned it bore the same expression.

"Do you see that?" said Henry. "If I were you, Katharine, I would have more spirit than to let those two make game of me. She is giving him permission to come and speak to you. I would not be subject to Miss Brooke's whims, if I were you," and Henry turned, and did not wait to see the effect of his words.

He was by no means an ill-natured youth, though the above short scene does not show him in a very kind or brotherly aspect; and had he really suspected Mr. Wentworth or any man of trifling with his sister, all the chivalrous part of his nature would have risen in arms, and he would have protected

her with manly zeal from the shadow of an insult. But he did not view the matter seriously at all ; he thought, like many others, that Katharine was a little bit of a flirt, and that she was mortified by seeing another bear away her last conquest ; he was himself chafed and irritated, and it was a species of relief to make Katharine as angry as himself. It pleased him, also, to believe that Henrietta flirted with Mr. Wentworth to tease and vex Katharine rather than to gratify herself.

But the words he had said had a deeper effect than he had intended or imagined ; the way had been previously prepared for them by a number of trifling occurrences and phases of feeling, and they came just at the moment to put the final stroke to the idea which had been ripening in Katharine's mind.

All Grace Oakenshaw's words, all Henrietta's manœuvres, rose before her, and she began to believe that, after all, she might only be considered as a tool, that Henrietta was amusing herself at her expense, and that Mr. Wentworth was aware of this amusement.

It was a bitter thought, particularly after the flattering notions with which others had been seeking to embue her.

It was a bitter thought, and, so far as Mr. Wentworth was concerned, an unjust one, and one which, in a less irritated frame of mind, she would not have

entertained for a moment. But she was not in a mood to consider justice; all the worst part of her nature was aroused, and her only aim was to show the contempt and indifference she fancied she felt.

It was in this spirit that she answered some trifling remark which Mr. Wentworth came across the room to make to her, but he did not appear to notice anything peculiar in her manner, and the confusion of setting out for the flower show soon separated them again.

By the time the party had reached the tent in which the flowers were exhibited, Mr. Wentworth was once more the companion of Henrietta Brooke. Katharine wandered about in a desultory manner, attaching herself to no one in particular, and feeling it very difficult to maintain a semblance of interest in a subject about which she had previously been one of the most eager. It was her nature to enter warmly into any pursuit, whether of business or pleasure, and for the past few weeks, she had been anxiously watching and tending some flowers that were to be exhibited, talking of them, conjecturing about their chances of gaining prizes, and laying small wagers with her brothers on the subject.

Now the sounds which greeted her entrance into the tent—"Katharine, your calceolaria has got a prize;" "See, mamma's is the best bouquet of cut flowers;" and the like, could scarcely call forth a

fitting answer, and her smiles of pleasure and sympathy were woefully forced. Happily for her, others were too much occupied to observe her closely, and she also soon began to rouse herself from her abstraction.

This kind of conduct would never do, she said to herself: no; she was not going to mope and be melancholy—she would be as Henry had suggested, spirited.

This valorous resolution was strengthened by the sight of Cousin Bessy, who was gazing at the figures of Miss Brooke and Mr. Wentworth, evidently acknowledging to herself that her conjectures of that morning had been wrong.

“Cousin Bessy sees that Henrietta keeps her *beau*,” said Katharine to herself, recalling the speech that had been made. “Well, never mind, I will show myself indifferent;” and forthwith Katharine assumed her most animated manner, spoke to all her acquaintances with the most lively eagerness, sometimes it must be owned with flippancy, her part being one which is very easily overacted. Still she did not feel satisfied: she had suffered herself, of late, to triumph in attentions for which, quietly as they were bestowed, other girls envied her; it was rather hard, setting aside all deeper feelings—feelings, indeed, which in the excitement of wounded vanity, she resolutely ignored—it was rather hard on a public occasion like this to see herself neglected, to walk

about the busy scene without some one constant attendant. Katharine had seldom had cause to complain of want of notice, but lately she had rather withdrawn from everything of the kind ; when under the influence of a stronger affection vanity had been in abeyance, and when she was not monopolized by Mr. Wentworth she had preferred the society of companions of her own sex ; on the present occasion, therefore, when she would have been glad to receive some of the hitherto rejected attention, as a means of showing her *spirit*, there was no one at hand to pay it. No one ? Yes ; the thought suddenly struck her ; one there was ever ready on her slightest claim to be her willing and obedient slave, and in that moment of irritated feeling and mortification, Katharine did not thrust from her, as she ought to have done, the temptation to trifle, even in the least degree, with an affection true and devoted as Philip Thorpe's.

It is not pleasant to dwell on this part of Katharine's history : it is enough to say that the summoning glance was given, the deceivingly gracious words were spoken, and Katharine was not doomed to appear at the Fairfield horticultural meeting unattended and unadmired.

Of course she was not happy ; in fact, the afternoon was a miserable one, but excitement carried her through it. A trifling incident occurred which caused her flirtation, if such it may be called, with Philip to become yet more evident.

They had been strolling about the field, and were returning to the flower-tent, when Mr. Wentworth and Henrietta approached them: Katharine in her eagerness to seem preoccupied and not to notice them turned a little aside from the proper entrance to the tent; her foot became entangled in one of the tent ropes, and she would have fallen if Mr. Wentworth had not saved her.

Philip, on his part, was not backward with his assistance, and caught her hand almost at the same moment, and to him Katharine, though knowing who had really helped her, was weak enough to address her thanks.

Henrietta was profuse in her inquiries and sympathies.

“Dear Katharine, are you hurt? Come and sit down on this bench a little; do you think you have sprained your foot?” and she tried to draw her to the seat which Mr. Wentworth had brought forward.

But Katharine, still leaning on Philip’s arm, only said—

“I must go home; my foot is painful; I have twisted my ankle in some way: Philip, will you take me to uncle James’s? I need not trouble any one else.”

“But are you sure you can walk?” asked Mr. Wentworth; “you had better rest a short time.”

“Oh, Philip can get the pony-carriage or some

sort of conveyance, I dare say," said Katharine.

"Instantly," said Philip; "I will bring it to the gate in two minutes, if you wait here for that time;" and he darted away with a joyous countenance.

Katharine now accepted the offered seat, and endured Henrietta's unwelcome assiduities. In little more than two minutes Philip again appeared, with the intelligence that the pony-carriage was at the gate, and, leaning on his strong arm, she managed to reach it with ease. He almost lifted her in, and silently and rapidly drove her to her destination.

Katharine was silent, partly because her foot really was painful, partly because it was no longer necessary to keep up an appearance of animation. Philip was silent because he was astonished at his own happiness, and also because he thought he should have a long uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* with Katharine in the house, and thus have time to say all he wanted. To say, perhaps, more than he had ever dared to say before, and the mere contemplation of such a possibility was enough to make him grave and thoughtful for the present.

But a *tête-à-tête* with Philip formed no part of Katharine's plan; the house once reached, the observing throng left behind, and Katharine's graciousness to Philip underwent a sudden change. Instead of suffering him to lead her into the drawing-room, to pass there the intervening hours till the return of

the rest of the party, she seized the arm of the housemaid who opened the door, and announced her intention of going up-stairs to Miss Grover's room to rest.

Philip fancied, however, that after taking off her bonnet, and ascertaining what injury her foot had sustained, she would return, and he walked into the drawing-room to wait for her. Twenty minutes passed, Philip became impatient; half-an-hour, time was growing precious; why did she not come? The others would be here presently, and the quiet *tête-à-tête* might not take place at all.

He opened the drawing-room door, looked up and down the passage, listened at the foot of the stairs; not a sound, not a footstep.

Philip grew desperate; perhaps, after all, he had been mistaken—Katharine had not cared for his society this afternoon; and yet—her looks, her tones! never, for many a long day, had they been so sweet and kind, and Philip was too happy at the change to ask if it were genuine: where Katharine was concerned, he, the strong man, was simple and credulous as a little child. Though no one could have less conceit than he had, his confidence in Katharine was so great that, if she granted him the most trifling favour, he was ready to believe implicitly that affection prompted it. Oh, Katharine, Katharine! Philip Thorpe might not suit your peculiar taste, nay, you two might not be formed to constitute each other's

happiness, and you might be doing right to reject his love, but you should never have stained your truth and purity by the shadow of a deception practised upon him! At length a rustling was heard, a step on the stairs; Philip was then at the opposite end of the passage, and he turned quickly, though he knew the tread was not Katharine's.

The housemaid, the girl who had accompanied her up-stairs, met his view.

"Well, where is Miss Katharine, Mary?" he asked, hastily. "Is her foot very bad?"

"Oh, no, sir; only a little bit of a strain; she sent me away long since, and said she wanted nothing."

"Go up to her, and say I wish to know how she is, and when she is coming down," said Philip, in a tone of much more authority than he generally used.

The girl vanished, smiling to herself; in all the households of the Thorpe clan, the devotion of Mr. Philip to Miss Katharine was a familiar thing, and many and various were the comments made upon it.

Philip had not to wait long for a reply: before he had time to walk twice the length of the passage, the girl returned.

"Miss Katharine found her foot rather painful, and she preferred staying in Miss Lucy's room for an hour or two: she hoped Mr. Philip would not stay away from the flower show on her account."

“Mr. Philip” received the message in gloomy silence, and stalked back to the drawing-room; the idea of his returning alone to the flower show! Katharine *must* know that he only attended such places for her sake. Katharine, meanwhile, reclining on Lucy’s bed, and left in solitude, was indulging in a train of reflections by no means satisfactory; she felt that she had been acting unjustifiably by Philip, and with a sensation of shame she recalled the looks and words she had employed—looks and words, unimportant enough in themselves, but which, when addressed to Philip and contrasted with her usual behaviour towards him, assumed a marked significance. She knew that with him she could steer no trifling course; what might have been harmless nonsense with another person became a serious affair when Philip was concerned. She knew that he loved her, and she knew that on this afternoon, merely that she might appear indifferent to the seeming neglect of another, she had given him reason to suppose his love was encouraged, if not returned. The thought caused her much self-reproach, and yet, she could scarcely bring herself at present to repent her conduct: the smart wound her vanity had received was still too keenly experienced to admit of more just emotions; and her cheek still flushed with indignation when the obnoxious idea recurred to her that Henrietta had been all along deceiving her—had encouraged, and perhaps led her to expose, her foolish pre-

ference for Mr. Wentworth—had made her fancy that he liked her—and all the time had been herself carrying on a flirtation, perhaps something more serious, with him. As for *him*—she would not think of him now; her indignation against Henrietta was quite enough to occupy her at present.

These thoughts were turned over and over in Katharine's mind, and their continued contemplation brought her no relief; on the contrary, each mental repetition of Henry's careless words, "She is giving him permission to speak to you," gave her an additional pang.

At length her musings were interrupted, a sound of voices on the stairs, the opening and shutting of doors, and various other noises, gave token that the flower-show party had returned.

Lucy's room was in a manner taken by storm, as all the girls, having heard from Henrietta of Katharine's accident, were anxious to ascertain that it was not really of much importance.

Mrs. Rivers too, who was not going to stay the evening, looked in, to make inquiry about it. But amongst all the inquiring voices there was not one so sympathising and solicitous as that of Henrietta; indeed, the amount of interest she took in Katharine's slight hurt was more than the occasion justified.

She recalled, too, awful stories of the sad effects that had been experienced from a slight twist or sprain which had been neglected, and she recom-

mended continued rest as a safeguard against ill consequences in the present case.

But Katharine, who had risen, and was now walking across the room, with only a trifling limp, merely smiled at these predictions, feeling sure all the time that Henrietta had some covert motive for talking in a prudential strain, which was so unlike the somewhat daring and reckless nature of her usual sentiments.

“What nonsense!” exclaimed Lucy Grover; “why, in half an hour Katharine will be able to walk as well as ever she did in her life. To be sure there is the dancing to-night; I am afraid you will not be able to manage that, Katharine; you will have to play instead, and we shall have the benefit of all your good polkas.”

“Katharine ought not to put her foot on the ground the whole evening,” said Henrietta. “I know what these sprains are; Charlotte was on the sofa once for three weeks, with one she got in the same way.”

“But this is not a real sprain,” said Katharine, and she proceeded to arrange her hair, preparatory to accompanying the others down-stairs.

Henrietta did not say anything more for some minutes, but afterwards, when Katharine was alone at the dressing-table, she went up to her and said, coaxingly—

“Take my advice, Katharine dear; stay quietly

here to-night and nurse that poor foot of yours. It would never do for you to get lame with all our nutting parties in prospect."

"Really, Henrietta, I don't see why I should stay up here by myself all the evening; of course I shall not dance, and my foot will not take any more harm in the drawing-room than here."

"Of course you would be dull," said Henrietta, "but we would come and see you in turns, and enliven you with the account of our doings. And as you cannot dance you would not miss much, and you ought to keep your foot upon a sofa or something, and you would not like to make a fuss about it down-stairs."

"I can have a footstool, I suppose," said Katharine, with the air of a person who will hear no further objections; and, putting the finishing touch, not a very gentle one, to her hair, she withdrew from the glass, and sat down to wait until Lucy Grover was ready to go down-stairs, which would not be, she well knew, before she had succeeded in *bandolining* firmly to her forehead two stubborn locks of her refractory yellowish hair, which had a tendency to stand out in bristles.

Henrietta, seeing her purpose defeated, had not any object in remaining, and her own toilette being irreproachably perfect, she descended to the drawing-room. She was in a little embarrassment as to her further proceedings, and she began to regret that the

delight of prosecuting a species of flirtation with Mr. Wentworth and of exhibiting him as one of her worshippers, had caused her to lose sight of her object—the separation of Philip and Katharine. This afternoon had made her tremble for the continuance of her reign at the Grange; Katharine had given such visible encouragement, and Mrs. Thorpe had noticed it with so many hints, significant nods, and gratified smiles; and now, when Katharine could not dance, she would be almost necessarily thrown with the non-dancing Philip. Oh, it was a mismanaged affair altogether; how could she have been so foolish as to monopolize Mr. Wentworth herself, instead of letting him pay suspicious attentions to Katharine!

Poor Mr. Wentworth! he would not have been much flattered had he known the free-and-easy way in which Miss Brooke disposed of him in her thoughts!

CHAPTER XII.

ACTING.

It was from no pressing wish for society that Katharine had so steadily resisted Henrietta's entreaties that she would remain up-stairs all the evening, but because she felt assured that Henrietta wanted her out of the way; a conviction which roused within her all her spirit of opposition. Had she been left to herself, she might possibly have declined joining the circle in the drawing-room, for though her own thoughts were not very pleasant companions at the present moment, yet the necessity of acting a part of gaiety and animation was very irksome to her.

She would not allow herself to be natural, and yet she shrank from a repetition of the proceedings of the afternoon.

When she and Lucy Grover entered the drawing-room, the whole party had assembled; the few additional guests whom Mrs. James Thorpe had invited having adjourned to her house from the flower show, for this was no formal party requiring an elaborate evening toilette. The usual little coteries were

formed; the usual small-talk indulged, being, however, enlivened by some new matter, on account of the important events of the last two days.

Shortly after tea dancing was proposed, and Katharine found herself placed at the piano; it had been decided by common consent that, as she could not dance, she must furnish music for the rest. She was not sorry to occupy herself in this manner, as it was thus quite impossible for Philip to proceed with the kind of conversation he tried to commence. She could not, however, prevent his standing by her side, and as it was well known that Philip had not the remotest idea of turning over leaves, and as standing by a piano was quite out of his vocation, his appearance there had something conspicuous about it. Katharine knew what people would think and say; and, by a strange inconsistency, the apparent devotion which she had called forth and encouraged in the afternoon was now burdensome and oppressive to her. Since she had been in the room, she had once or twice caught Mr. Wentworth's eye fixed upon her in a way which caused somewhat of a revolution in her feelings, and she had had time to observe that he and Henrietta were not together; he was dancing with Hester, and previously he had been talking to Agatha.

Still all the effects of Henry's words and her own observations had not vanished, and she felt uncomfortable, distracted, uncertain of her own thoughts,

and touchily sensitive about the possible ones of other people.

Mechanically she continued to play the polkas, quadrilles, and waltzes that were asked for; instinctively she smiled in answer to the thanks for her good-nature in playing, and the faint hints that she "must be tired," that it was "too bad to keep her at the piano all the evening," and the like.

At the close of one of the dances Henrietta approached the piano with Mr. Wentworth, who had just been her partner.

"What a charming polka you have been giving us!" she commenced. "Mr. Wentworth and I have been admiring it so much; have we not?"

"Yes; it is a very good one," returned he.

"But I am sure, Katharine, you must be tired," continued Henrietta. "Do come into the passage for a little change, and listen to a capital story Mr. Wentworth has just been telling me, about——"

Mr. Wentworth, thus, in a manner, appealed to, interrupted Henrietta's speech by offering his arm to Katharine; but Katharine had no fancy for attentions which were prompted by another person, and she was determined to resist Henrietta's incomprehensible endeavours once more to throw her and Mr. Wentworth together. She said, therefore—

"Thank you, I am not at all tired of playing; and I dare say some of them are ready for another

dance," and she struck the first few chords of a stirring galop.

Mr. Wentworth smiled slightly, and Katharine felt that he was thinking her petulant or capricious, but she could not then alter her behaviour. She saw him turn away, and heard his words to Henrietta—

"It is a pity to waste the music; shall we dance?"

And, to her surprise, Henrietta answered—

"I am too tired for a galop at present."

It was so unusual for Henrietta to plead fatigue, that Katharine was convinced she had some reason for not choosing to dance with Mr. Wentworth, and, though she could not precisely guess it, she fancied that in some way she herself was connected with it. Henrietta sat down by the piano, and sent Philip into another room to look for her fan, and when he returned she prevented him from again taking his station by Katharine's side, saying, with a little, surprised laugh—

"You, Philip, professing to turn over leaves! I am sure you will make blunders. I will turn them for you, Katharine."

"It is not necessary, thank you," said Katharine, "I am playing without notes;" but Henrietta had already taken Philip's place. He, however, merely changed to the other side of the piano; something in Katharine's manner, both to Mr. Wentworth and

Henrietta, was indescribably encouraging to him. Presently Mr. Wentworth came up again :

“ Everybody is tired, Miss Rivers, and much obliged to you for playing, so you may rest your fingers a little.”

“ From dance music, at least,” said Henrietta ; “ but you promised to sing just now, Mr. Wentworth, and I know Katharine has the accompaniment to the song you mentioned.”

“ The ‘ Song of the Swallow,’ was it ? I am quite ready to fulfil any promise I may have made, if Miss Rivers will do her part,” said Mr. Wentworth, lightly.

But Katharine immediately rose from her seat, saying—

“ I have made no promises ; and we know that Mr. Wentworth plays his own accompaniments.”

“ Sometimes—not always,” returned he ; “ and you have played the ‘ Song of the Swallow ’ for me before.”

Katharine was unheeding, and with a little flippant air, she said—

“ I think people generally sing best to their own accompaniment ; there can be no differences of opinion about expression, taste, &c.” Then she took Philip’s arm, and allowed him to lead her to a seat at some distance, giving him, at the same time, and *because she knew Henrietta and Mr. Wentworth were looking*, one of those glances, which, rare as they were,

never failed to send a thrill of hope and rapture through Philip's heart.

Oh, Katharine! Katharine!

But Philip had no opportunity of expressing anything that he felt, for immediately afterwards she made a gesture of silence, as Mr. Wentworth commenced singing.

Though she would not play his accompaniment, she seemed inclined to pay him the compliment of listening to his song; scarcely, however, with pleasure; there were too many emotions harassing Katharine at the present moment to allow anything like calm appreciation.

When the song was over, as if still to avoid exclusive conversation with Philip, she called to Lucy Grover to come and sit near her, and, Lucy once established on the sofa, Philip sank into resigned silence.

"The girls want to get up a charade," said Lucy, after some desultory observations, "but they cannot think of a word; you will be obliged to help them, Katharine."

"I don't think a charade will answer to-night," said Katharine; "it does very well by ourselves, but there would be too many lookers-on; you know, Lucy, we never can persuade the gentlemen to act, and there is no occasion for us to exhibit before them."

"Oh! Mr. Wentworth," exclaimed Lucy, seeing

him draw near, "do you like charades? We want to get one up, but Katharine says gentlemen never will join, will you?"

"I shall be happy to be a spectator," said Mr. Wentworth.

"You ought to act," said Lucy, "but never mind, if you like looking on, it will do. Some of them seem to think charades stupid, but I am glad you don't. I never act myself, but it is fun, I think, to see the others. So you really do approve of charades, Mr. Wentworth?"

"Oh, decidedly," said he, with much gravity, replying to the latter part of Lucy's unconnected sentence; "I think they form an admirable safety-valve for disposing of the superfluous spirit of acting which exists amongst us."

"What *do* you mean?" asked the mystified Lucy. "I am sure I have no spirit of acting to dispose of."

"I did not accuse you, Miss Grover; I spoke generally."

"But I don't see——" commenced Lucy.

"Don't you see, that when people have a love for acting, it is much better to indulge it under its own name, as in a charade. In this case, it is harmless, which it is not always indulged in another way."

Lucy comprehended not a whit more from this explanation, but changed the subject, as she usually did when people were too deep for her, a by no means rare occurrence.

Katharine, however, *did* understand, *would* have understood, even without the slight glance which Mr. Wentworth had directed towards her. He had read her, it seemed; he knew that her present manner was feigned, and perhaps he could see even down to her deepest motives. A burning blush of shame rose to her cheeks; she was mortified, angry with herself, yet scarcely offended with him. There was a touch of playfulness, of sympathy even, mingled with the half-reproachful look he cast upon her, which disarmed her indignation. Perhaps the certainty that he observed her pleased her and softened her feelings; at any rate, she even forgot to accuse him in her heart of having himself deserved the censure he had implied towards her; for had not he also been acting a part in his conduct towards her and Henrietta? a fact, which most probably, like a true man, he did not remember.

Lucy meanwhile continued to chatter, unmindful of any by-play that might be going on, and Philip remained too much pre-occupied to notice anything peculiar in Mr. Wentworth's words or Katharine's manner.

As for Katharine, she was spared further embarrassment by an eager entreaty from Cecilia Walters, that she would assist in getting up a charade; and, only too glad of an excuse, she rose, seized Cecilia's arm, and, as rapidly as her twisted foot would allow, accompanied her and her coadju-

tors out of the room. Though Katharine took no part in the acting herself, she was fully occupied in arranging the charades and dressing the performers during the remainder of the evening, and she did not return to the drawing-room until it was nearly time to depart.

It was a beautiful night, and some of the party chose to walk through the fields, but Katharine was, of course, unable to do so. As she took her place in the pony-carriage with Grace Oakenshaw and Fanny, Mr. Wentworth came up to say "Good night."

Katharine shook hands with him, but scarcely spoke; her lively manner had deserted her, since she had fancied that he penetrated through its disguise. Nothing, however, in him reminded her of his previous pointed words. With a cordial "Good bye," and a "Take care of the poor foot," he left her.

There is often much in the turn of a sentence; trifling as the above may seem, it implied to Katharine a kind familiarity, and somewhat neutralized the effect of what had gone before. If he had said, "I hope your foot will be better to-morrow, Miss Rivers," she would have felt differently. Was she very foolish?

The pony-carriage drove away, and Katharine silently pursued her own thoughts.

Mr. Manners and Mr. Wentworth, meanwhile,

joined the walking party, the latter becoming for the time Agatha's companion. He had during the later portion of the evening talked with her more than any one else; in fact, somewhat puzzled and annoyed by the strange avoidance of both Henrietta and Katharine, he had in a manner taken refuge with her.

With him Agatha was never variable; she did not, like Henrietta, at one time seek to attract him, and at another refuse every attention; nor was she, as Katharine had appeared to be to-day, actuated by sudden, wayward impulses; but she always seemed pleased to converse with him, a compliment which she most assuredly paid to no other person. Mr. Wentworth had faults, but vanity was not one of them; he did not attribute this peculiarity to any excellence of his own; he simply thought that few took the trouble to adapt their conversation to Agatha's individuality, and that he himself by some happy chance, or some remote sympathy, had from the first been able to comprehend her. As a natural consequence, she spoke easily and comparatively frankly with him, when she was cold and constrained with others. He also considered her so fenced in by some invisible barrier against anything like sentiment, that he never dreamt of the possibility of continued intercourse leading to a more tender feeling on either side. He talked to her as he might have done to a friend of his own sex, and never for a

moment imagined that any one, least of all Agatha herself, would draw any other conclusion. Though she was actually a little younger than himself, she seemed to him much older. Not from her appearance so much as from her gravity, her want of youthful buoyancy, and apparently of youthful weaknesses. He could fancy her a firm, judicious, unsparing, unflinching friend; a fond, devoted, trusting, clinging woman, never!

Mr. Manners did not spare him during their walk home after leaving the Hazel Bank party any more than he had done on the night of the Brakely fête. According to him, such a very decided flirtation with Henrietta Brooke during the early part of the day had been a superfluous proceeding; and he declared that if Katharine and his friend really cared about each other, they acted in a very unjustifiable way towards other people. Mr. Wentworth attempted no defence on his account, but, as to Katharine, he refused to admit that there had been anything extraordinary in her conduct, and chose to put down everything to Philip Thorpe's persistent devotion.

“Well,” said Mr. Manners, “you may be right; but, for my part, I cannot help believing she tried to make a fool of him to-day; and I can tell you, little as I know of Philip Thorpe, that he is much too fine a fellow for such treatment, and not the man to submit to it tamely for long.”

Marmaduke did not dispute Philip's good qualities, and waived all further discussion of the subject.

He had no fancy for speaking about Katharine and his still unsettled projects even with Mr. Manners, and he was conscious, besides, that his apparently wavering conduct might furnish legitimate cause for censure.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GIPSY TEA-PARTY IN UNDERWOOD.

THE next evening, Katharine was sitting alone at the open window of the drawing-room ; all the others had gone out walking, and her foot kept her a prisoner in the house.

Grace Oakenshaw indeed, and Hester, and even Agatha, had severally offered to stay and keep her company, but she had refused to hear of such a thing, declaring that they ought not to lose the lovely evening. In truth, Katharine was not sorry to be alone ; the silence of the house was soothing to her, and the soft summer air, fanning her cheek, seemed to bring peace and composure with it. Many and various were the phases of feeling she had gone through during the last four-and-twenty hours ; at one moment, shame and self-reproach for her conduct to Philip, then anger towards Mr. Wentworth, for having presumed to guess that her manner was feigned ; what business had he to say such things to her, to hint that she was acting ? then had followed a gush of softened feeling, an acknowledg-

ment of his superiority, a satisfaction that he had watched her, a confession that he had been blameless, and she herself touchy, easily offended, ridiculously annoyed. Then returned the vague hopes and wishes which yesterday had put to flight; the gentle day-dreams which a few words of silly gossip and banter had dispelled; and, at length, all moods and feelings had merged in one—the longing wish to see “him” again, to draw from his look, from his manner, some assurance that she was—not loved, Katharine’s fancies did not extend so far, consciously at least—but that she was liked better than Henrietta Brooke, or, at any rate, considered in a different light. Sitting at the window, watching the last sunbeams gild the brilliant geraniums and play upon the rustic carving of the flower-stand, listening to the gentle rustling of the breeze amongst the vine-leaves, Katharine idly mused away the evening, no book on her knee, no work in her hands—so unlike the ever-busy, ever-active Katharine!

At length she started: the garden-gate unclosed and a figure advanced up the walk. A sudden impulse caused her to shrink within the muslin curtains, hastily to smooth the braided hair on which her hand had been resting, to draw towards her the unopened work-box, and to busy her fingers in some purposeless rummaging amongst its contents.

And then the door opened, and Mr. Wentworth

entered the room. Katharine was composed enough now, and spoke and looked in her usual manner; the vague imaginings of the last half-hour had left no visible trace behind them. It might seem as if, in Mr. Wentworth's actual presence, they had all vanished in the cool, tranquil flow of easy acquaintance.

He inquired after the welfare of her foot, hoped none of the party were feeling any fatigue from yesterday's exertions, concluded that they had all gone out to enjoy the beautiful evening, &c.

Katharine replied in the same strain, and proceeded to talk about the flower show; not that the subject was a particularly pleasant one to her, but because everybody appeared to think it necessary to say a good deal about it, and to praise the admirable manner in which it had gone off, and to predict that the new Horticultural Society was sure to flourish after such a happy commencement.

"Yes," said Mr. Wentworth, after listening to some common-place remarks of this tendency from Katharine; "yes, it is true, and flower shows are nice—what we must call, I suppose, *rational* amusements, and so forth; but seriously, as far as I am concerned, I soon tire of walking round a tent to look at forced fruits and flowers tortured into ingenious devices. I like to see them in their natural state, growing in the open air, much better; and so far as enjoyment goes, I think a flower show is on

a par with an archery meeting, or any such tame affair. Nobody really cares for the amusement itself; it is merely an excuse for meeting one's friends, and very pleasant, provided one meets the right people."

"Oh, of course a great deal depends upon one's own party at such places," said Katharine, looking down, for she felt that her companion's eyes were scanning her rather curiously.

"It would be an odd calculation to make out how many of the people who say, 'Oh, what a charming flower show! Really, I have been so pleased,' have had any actual enjoyment, would it not?" continued Mr. Wentworth.

"I don't know," said Katharine. "I fancy most people enjoyed yesterday."

"You may be mistaken. I dare say you put me down in your mind as one of the satisfied and contented."

As Mr. Wentworth paused for an answer, Katharine replied with some spirit—

"You seemed happy enough, I am sure."

"That shows how wisely we judge of other people's happiness," said he. "The whole day was a greater weariness and burden to me than you can imagine."

Katharine involuntarily raised her eyes, the tone of the last few words was so serious, so different from the half-joking one which had preceded it.

The look she met was one she had never seen on

Mr. Wentworth's face before; in one sense it caused her supreme satisfaction; in another, a sort of sympathetic regret, which she could not have explained. It was a look at once of tenderness and renunciation. Katharine felt that, henceforth, no flirtations with Henrietta Brooke would have power to disturb her; that, in future, however circumstances might combine to puzzle her, she should rest in perfect confidence that Mr. Wentworth's *feeling* for her was real and deep. To the feeling itself she gave, in thought, no name; call it love, or disguise it as friendship, it came to the same in the end; it was a feeling, to have awakened which called forth the most intense joy she had ever experienced.

But still no words had been spoken; and looks, however accurately they may be interpreted, must not be answered, so Katharine, as many another woman has done, when her heart was throbbing with deepest emotion, and her whole being absorbed and concentrated in one earnest feeling, gave a reply of unnecessary levity—

“Dear me! how forlorn that sounds! I must say you managed to conceal your grief admirably, and deck your countenance with artificial smiles.”

“Ah, you may laugh, Miss Rivers, but you do not in your heart of hearts believe that yesterday was a pleasant day to me—you *must* understand; but you are wise, perhaps, in speaking as you do, and teach me a lesson I ought to have remembered.”

Katharine returned no light answer to this speech ; and it is impossible to say to what further imprudence her silence might have led Mr. Wentworth, had not the entrance of Fanny interrupted the *tête-à-tête*. A few more unguarded words, and the course of Katharine's life would have been changed, as well as that of others, and this story would never have been written.

Fanny had been for a short walk with her mamma, and they had returned before any of the others ; Katharine had not observed them walking up the garden, and both she and Mr. Wentworth started as Fanny entered the room, and the latter, who had risen, and was standing near Katharine, retreated rather precipitately to his chair.

A moment or two later, Mrs. Rivers came into the room, and the conversation became general.

From this evening forward, any one who had closely observed the little drama which was being enacted in this quiet nook of society, would have perceived a decided difference in the conduct of Mr. Wentworth towards Katharine. He no longer checked himself in his intercourse with her, and no longer had recourse to flirtation with Henrietta Brooke as a blind to his real feelings. And though he never spoke any decided words of love to Katharine, yet she felt supremely contented and happy ; and the occurrences and sensations of the flower-show day seemed to have passed away from her remem-

brance like an evil dream. Wrapped up in present enjoyment, she even forgot to reproach herself for the conduct into which she had been led on that day by mortified vanity ; a thing which it would not have been so easy to do, had she been exposed to the chance of meeting Philip Thorpe ; but fortunately for her present peace of mind, he had been obliged to leave home on business the very day after the flower show, and she was thus spared the consequences which her reckless encouragement of his attachment fully deserved. Of course, the gossips of Fairfield made various remarks upon Katharine's behaviour, and were still more firmly established in their opinion that she was a flirt ; they began to wonder whether she cared in reality for either her cousin or Mr. Wentworth, and to speculate upon the intentions of the latter. Poor Mrs. Thorpe was greatly puzzled, and regretted perpetually that Philip had left home at such an unlucky time, and it may be imagined that Henrietta Brooke did not fail to make her aware of the increasing intimacy between Katharine and Mr. Wentworth. Mrs. Thorpe now wondered that Mr. and Mrs. Rivers did not put a stop to these proceedings ; if they approved, as she believed they did, of Philip, why did they allow Katharine to make herself conspicuous in receiving the attentions of another man ?—a stranger too, a young man nobody knew ; to be sure he was nephew to the rich Mr. Burton, but then, his connection seemed to be of very little use

to him : he had no profession ; he was dawdling away his time reading, no one knew for what ; he said he did not mean to be a clergyman ; he did not like the law ; why in the world was he wasting his time in this way ? Really Katharine's parents ought to know better than to let her have an idle man dangling after her.

Henrietta, to whom these opinions were day by day expressed, knew perfectly well the style of answer to return. Mr. and Mrs. Rivers were so unworldly, she said, if Katharine's affections were concerned they would never object to want of fortune ; and Mr. Wentworth was so thoroughly gentlemanly, so really fascinating when he liked, that she should never be surprised at his inducing them to look over his doubtful prospects, even his defects—for idle and wanting in energy he undoubtedly was. And then, there was something about his manner and his way of thinking that just suited Mrs. Rivers, and everybody knew how much she and Katharine were alike in their tastes and opinions ; and so Henrietta went on enlarging upon the subject, and causing poor Mrs. Thorpe to bewail Philip's absence, and grow irritated about Mr. Wentworth's perfections every day of her life.

In truth, neither she nor Henrietta exactly understood Mr. and Mrs. Rivers on this point. They, in reality, troubled themselves much less about Mr. Wentworth's devotions and intentions than the rest of the world did. In the first place, they were not

always present on the occasions when he and Katharine were most thrown together; and, of course, the gossip on the subject was not repeated before them. Then, too, both of them had a horror of anything like match-making, or even of thinking about what is called "getting daughters off." They liked their children to have amusement, and they trusted to their own good sense to keep them out of scrapes. If they had any schemes at all in relation to Katharine, the match with Philip was the most likely one to fall within their consideration, but they were in the habit of looking upon her as too young to marry, and of thinking that at some future day she would appreciate Philip's goodness and worth. As to Mr. Wentworth, they liked him, but never considered him in the light of a possible son-in-law; he was evidently fond of ladies' society, and appeared to be particularly attracted by that of their own daughters, and their immediate friends, but as yet, Mr. Rivers at any rate had no suspicion that Katharine was his favourite. Meantime summer was rapidly passing away; Caroline and her friend Cecilia had returned to school, and Grace Oakenshaw, whose departure had been postponed from week to week, was, at length, peremptorily summoned home. Mr. Wentworth, too, had been heard to say that his summer holiday was over, and that he was going away; where, no one seemed to know, only Mr. Manners had hinted that he was not to return to Oxford.

The picnics were, of course, becoming less frequent as the party of summer visitants diminished; but there still remained one expedition which had not been accomplished, and which Grace's threatened departure brought to a crisis.

This was one of those pleasant gatherings known in country life as "gipsy teas," and the spot fixed for it was sufficiently near to make it a convenient excursion for the shortened evenings, even without the advantage so commonly insisted upon in such undertakings—a moonlight night.

In one of the glades of the Underwood, where Katharine had gone in search of Agatha, on that sunny afternoon, some four months ago, there was a most inviting spot for a rural merry-making, and at this very place it had for some time been the custom of the Rivers family to have annually a gipsy tea-party. "Hannah's mother" and her little girls were great auxiliaries on these occasions, the good Mrs. Watson undertaking to furnish the tea-table, and afterwards to wash up and assist in packing the tea-things, the children rushing about continually on vague errands, fancying themselves useful, and enjoying for some days afterwards an unusual feast on the cakes and other dainties which were left behind.

But the great fun, after all, was in the making and managing the fire; young ladies picking up sticks and arranging them with their dainty little

fingers; gentlemen making wise suggestions as to the position of the fire with reference to the wind; and then perhaps, in the end, the whole party discovering that there was a flaw in the arrangements: either the wind had changed, or the calculations had been incorrect, and the smoke was blowing over the white table-cloth and neatly arranged tea-equipage; and so the whole business must be commenced again, at least that, as the fire remained stationary, the other paraphernalia must be removed.

These and other *contretemps* of the like nature took place at this gipsy tea as well as those of former years; but Katharine, who was usually the most energetic person in the fire-making and cloth-arranging, did not grant either of these matters much of her attention. She was looking for nuts with Mr. Wentworth, nutting being one of the ostensible objects of a party to Underwood. Beyond a single greenish-looking cluster, which Katharine held in her hand, they did not seem to have made much progress in their pursuit; but the narrow shady path, along which they were walking, was an admirable place for discussions on subjects more interesting than the size and growth of nuts, or the likely spots to find them. Mr. Wentworth was speaking more seriously perhaps than he had ever before done to Katharine: he was telling her something of his prospects and his plans, vaguely indeed, for they were not yet matured. One thing, however,

she could gather from what he said, that, after a severe struggle, he was about to enter upon some course of life, which was naturally unpleasing to him, and that a consciousness that she approved of his decision was a matter of some importance to him.

Still no word of love, but also no need of it: Katharine knew, when she walked by his side in that green shady glen, that, whatever his plans might be, some thought of her was blended with them—knew, too, that her word and her glance were arming him with courage for the career from which he was inclined to shrink. It was not conceit or vanity which whispered this in Katharine's ear; it was that unmistakeable, irrepressible truth, which at some moments, in spite of obstacles of sense and veil of conventionalities, is borne like an electric shock from one human heart to another.

Such moments are rare, and soon pass away; but it may be doubted whether they do not contain more bliss than even the first rapturous ones of acknowledged, spoken love.

“You do not think, then,” said Mr. Wentworth, after a pause, when both had been occupied with thoughts they could not speak—“you do not think that a man who engages in pursuits of this material money-making kind binds down all his faculties to a grovelling, mammon-worshipping existence?”

“No, certainly not, if I understand you correctly,” said Katharine. “The business of the world must

be carried on, and to my mind there is something very grand and noble in the way in which science is made to save common life. I quite glory in all our achievements in manufactures and our triumphs over natural obstacles. How great it seems to be able to annihilate the difficulties of time and space, as we do! I always honour the men who make such pursuits their object."

"But, my dear Miss Rivers, you are looking on the romantic side of the question. You only think of the glory of the man who invents or carries out the wonderful adaptations of science to daily comfort and usefulness; you are forgetting the low, worldly side of the matter. To speak of railways as one instance. To you it appears an elevated, exalted thing to annihilate time and space. You do not think of all the speculation, the fraud, the trickery, the contrivances to increase the profits of a few individuals at the expense of benefit to mankind in general. Do you not think that, with examples such as you must have heard and read of, one may shrink from entering upon a career which so frequently warps the minds of those who engage in it, and turns them into sordid grovellers or speculating gamesters?"

"Of course, one does hear of terrible things of the kind," returned Katharine; "but might not your remarks apply to every profession under the sun? You know what is said of lawyers, and yet have there not been, are there not now, lawyers whom we

must all honour as great and good? I have always fancied, too, that even those who are occupied in what you would consider the most exalted pursuits—I mean completely mental ones—are likely to become so much engrossed with their own particular study, that their minds become quite narrowed and closed to other influences. Is it not so? Are not learned professors of colleges just as open to a fault of this kind, and as much tied down to the mechanical part of their pursuit, as merchants, or railway brokers, or contractors, or whatever you may call those money-making individuals?”

“Yes, it may be so; but the pursuit is in itself nobler. But what inference do you draw from all this?”

“That every mode of life alike may be a temptation, and that a man of free and noble mind may triumph over one as well as another, and have his higher nature unspoiled, unfettered by the every-day cares of his business, whether it be —— but you are laughing at me; I am getting beyond my depth, I believe.” And Katharine stopped, and the momentary glow of enthusiasm faded from her features.

“No! upon my honour, no!” said Mr. Wentworth, earnestly. “I was not laughing at you, but looking at you. I like that fresh, hopeful expression which lights up your face more than I can tell you. Excuse me. I should not say such things; but you little know the sudden energy with which your words

inspire me. I only hope it may not pass away when you are no longer near me."

There was a pause: Mr. Wentworth appeared to be communing with himself, and Katharine did not interrupt him. At length he spoke suddenly.

"How very different you and your sister Miss Marchmont are!"

"Has that just struck you?" said Katharine, with a smile.

"Not the fact that you are so, but a particular point of difference struck me more forcibly than before," he answered. "I just then remembered a conversation I once had with Miss Marchmont, which had some reference to the subject we have been discussing, and her views appeared so very unlike yours."

"We have not been brought up in the same way," said Katharine; "and naturally we see things in a different light. Agatha is so full of reverence for the past that she scarcely thinks the concerns of the present day deserve any one's attention."

"Exactly so. She would consider a life spent within the precincts of some ancient college a higher life than one spent in struggling with the world."

"I don't quite know," said Katharine; "it would depend upon the sort of struggle."

"Yes, perhaps; but she would never speak as you did a few minutes ago."

“Oh ! don’t recall my speeches, pray,” said Katharine, blushing. “I know that Agatha thinks my theories very wild, and her own disposition is much less sanguine than mine.”

“Sorrow has lowered her hopeful spirit,” said Mr. Wentworth. “May it never lower yours.”

The last words were spoken so seriously, so tenderly even, that Katharine could not reply, and as just then Fanny appeared, saying tea was ready, all exclusive conversation ceased.

How pleasant it was, on that soft September evening, to sit on the gentle slope of the green glade, to watch the light blue smoke from the gipsy fire curling upwards in the clear air, and the glow of the flame shedding a picturesque light on the scattered branches and ancient tree-roots around, and illuminating the merry faces of the busy little handmaidens Nelly and Nancy, as they hovered about it, and superintended the boiling of the kettle ! And then the fair white table-cloth, contrasting with the bright green turf, with all its inviting display of country delicacies—its rich cream, its fragrant honey, its home-made bread, and pure sweet butter. It was enough to make a gipsy tea be considered the most luxurious of rural pleasures.

Every one seemed in a humour for enjoyment, although, perhaps, the party was a quieter one than many of the preceding ones. Caroline and Cecilia were no longer present, with their ceaseless chatter

and loud laughter; and Henrietta Brooke, also the liveliest of the lively, had some other engagement on that afternoon. Henry Rivers, too, was quieter than usual: he had not quite recovered his disappointment with regard to Henrietta, and since he had ascertained that she had been merely playing with him, he had become considerably subdued, and his confidence in his own powers of charming had been not a little lowered. Agatha found the tone of the party much more in accordance with her own than usual, and her spirits rose in consequence. Noise and merriment on the part of others invariably depressed her, and *vice versâ*.

Altogether she was far more agreeable than usual, and more disposed for enjoyment.

Tea had been rather late, and when it was over it was almost time to return home, so no one wandered far from the general *rendezvous*. Some sought for nuts and ferns, and others sat on the fallen trees and watched the evening sky if sentimental, or sang glees if merry. Agatha had been walking about a little with Mr. Wentworth and was now sitting with him under some trees awaiting the announcement that the carriages were ready. Katharine was helping Mrs. Watson to pack the baskets which had to be sent home, and also assisting the children in collecting the good things they were to carry to their cottage, and Mr. Wentworth had lost sight of her. But he fancied she had gone with the baskets to the

road where the carriages were waiting, and expected her to reappear when all was ready, as he knew she intended walking home, and there had been a tacit understanding between them that they were to walk together. Perhaps he would not have been sorry for any excuse which might have caused him to leave Agatha and go to offer his assistance to Katharine in whatever arrangements she might be making, but his manner did not betray any impatience or want of attention. She, on her part, inspired, perhaps, by the soothing, happy influences of the evening, was talking in an unusually frank and even confiding manner ; speaking of Greymore and the past, and dwelling much more upon her feelings than was customary with her, and venturing to indulge in anticipations of a return to her loved home, and to a life of usefulness amongst those who had known and revered the objects of her early attachments. She was precisely in that mood of growing confidence which is the most easily thrown back upon itself, and checked by any appearance of indifference or want of sympathy in a listener. The voice of Mrs. James Thorpe was the first thing which damped Agatha's spirit ; she came up suddenly, exclaiming—

“ You here still, Mr. Wentworth ! I thought you were going with the walking party, and they have all started. Katharine and——”

Mr. Wentworth jumped up hastily, and ran to the edge of some rising ground, and then calling

out, "Oh, they are still in sight," he darted away, leaving Agatha to her fate, and utterly forgetful of the fact that she had told him she too intended walking.

Such an impulsive proceeding was not like him, but he had made up his mind to have this last walk with Katharine, and he could not bear to miss it.

"There will be room for you in my phaeton, Miss Marchmont," said Mrs. James Thorpe, who had sufficient penetration to perceive Agatha's discomfiture; but Agatha did not hear her. She had risen from her seat, and was watching the retreating figures of the walking party. She had quite imagined that Mr. Wentworth would accompany her, and when she saw him rapidly depart without a word or look for her; when she followed him with her eye till he reached the others, and immediately afterwards saw him and Katharine linger together behind the rest; when she saw all this, she turned away with a feeling of bitterness, a passionate longing to tear from her memory everything that had occurred during the last few months, and, in particular, the words of the last half-hour. She had been speaking freely, and giving confidence, and he—he could not stay to answer her, but had rushed away on the first intimation to join another. Why had she thought of him, spoken to him, as she had done to no other man before? Why had she allowed herself to rejoice in his presence, and

to desire it, from one day to another, as the sunshiny spot in her present life? Why had even the past become misty, and obscured by this new enjoyment? Ah! why had she, with all her pride and her strength of mind, suffered herself to become the sport of a vain dream, like a weak sentimental school-girl? Thoughts like these passed through Agatha's brain, and left their imprint on her cold, pale features. Cold, alas! no longer; fierce emotions and late-roused feelings were forcibly tearing away from them the mask of marble impassiveness.

She forgot, or cared not, that others observed her, and walked on by Mrs. James Thorpe's side to the phaeton utterly regardless of the curious glances Sophia cast upon her, and of her whispered comments to her sister Lucy.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DECLARATION IN THE DIAL-GARDEN.

IN three days more Mr. Wentworth had left the neighbourhood, not, however, as people say, for good; it was generally understood that he had gone to pay a visit to his uncle, and, that in a few weeks he would return to take a final leave of Mr. Manners and the Coverdale parsonage.

Katharine looked forward to his return with some anxiety, but was yet too happy to be very impatient. The days of his absence passed away in a blissful dream, and the common occurrences of life had not power to withdraw her from the sweet remembrances, and still sweeter anticipations, which filled up the measure of her thoughts. The only thing which disturbed her was the prospect of Philip Thorpe's return; day by day, she trembled to hear that he was expected, and each time she went to the Grange, she dreaded to find that he had already arrived. As much as possible she kept aloof from the place; she could read too well her aunt's inquiring looks, and Henrietta's significant ones, to

make it pleasant to her to go there at this period. But she could not always avoid it, and occasionally she was obliged to go alone, and to encounter all the talk about Philip, and the half-reproachful, half-coaxing hints, with which Mrs. Thorpe overwhelmed her in a *tête-à-tête*.

One afternoon, when Katharine was in the school-room with Fanny, Mrs. Rivers came in, asked her to walk to the Grange, with some explanatory sort of message about the socks which Mrs. Thorpe was knitting for Willie; they were either too large or too small; and there were besides, complications and peculiarities about them and about Willie's fancies, which it required an initiated person like Katharine to explain.

She was compelled to go alone, for Hester had a headache, and Fanny had some lessons to attend to, which ought not to be disturbed for a mere fancy; and as for Agatha, she never thought of asking her to visit Mrs. Thorpe unnecessarily; so, much against her inclination, she pursued her solitary walk along the well-known path to the Grange.

She found, as she had feared, Mrs. Thorpe alone, for Henrietta had gone to Fairfield to drink tea with some friends, and Mr. Thorpe was at a market, from which he would not return till late.

Her aunt took it as a matter of course that she would stay tea, and Katharine had no excuse to

make; indeed, when she found how really pleased Mrs. Thorpe was at having her solitary afternoon interrupted by a companion, she reproached herself for her unwillingness to remain.

Katharine really was a great favourite with her aunt, who considered her "good company," because she could always find plenty to talk about, and the two conversed together very amicably, so long as Philip was kept in the background. Unfortunately, however, this could not always be done, Mrs. Thorpe could not resist the temptation of making allusions to him; and more eager than politic, and utterly innocent of anything like a systematic manœuvre, she dilated on his perfections sufficiently to prejudice an indifferent person against him; or if she ever did attempt any half-concealment, or covert hints about him and his feelings, they were such as a child might have fathomed.

Katharine listened on these occasions with a would-be unconscious air, but in reality with an extremely uncomfortable feeling, in which was mingled a little self-reproach for the ingratitude she must display to what was after all prompted by real affection for her. Philip was Mrs. Thorpe's greatest treasure, and freely offered to her, and she could not accept the gift.

"We had a letter from Philip this morning," said Mrs. Thorpe, as they were sitting at tea, and during a pause in the conversation on indifferent

subjects, which Katharine had been assiduously keeping up.

"Indeed," said Katharine, rather busily helping herself to some marmalade.

"He said he should be at home in a day or two," continued Mrs. Thorpe. "He finished his business, you know, some days ago, and since then, he has been staying at Mr. Woodley's, a great friend of your uncle's, who has a large farm in Lincolnshire."

"Indeed," said Katharine again.

"Philip seems to like the Woodleys, though he is not fond of strangers, you know. There is a daughter, a very fine girl, I believe, and Philip has been riding about with her a good deal. I should like to see her, for I used to know her poor mother. I think I shall ask her to stay here."

"It would be very pleasant," said Katharine, for the sake of saying something.

"It might be dull for her," pursued Mrs. Thorpe; "only Henrietta might be here at the same time, and there would be all of you near, and if Philip is inclined to make himself agreeable to her, why, I suppose, he would contrive to amuse her."

"Yes, certainly," said Katharine.

"Philip is shy, poor boy, but he has more in him, perhaps, than some that make a great show. However, a sensible girl, as I am told Anne Woodley is, can see people as they are, I dare say."

Despite her annoyance, Katharine could scarcely help laughing as she saw Mrs. Thorpe's eye fixed upon her, evidently watching for some trace of pique on her countenance at this coupling of Philip's name with another girl's. Most devoutly did she wish that Anne Woodley could indeed take her place in the projects of Philip and his mother. She made no answer, beyond an affirmative movement of the head, and Mrs. Thorpe continued—

“Philip is not one of those fine, chattering young men, that can talk to any girl, but when he says a thing, he means it. But girls want so much nonsense and dangle after them. They never consider what kind of men make the best husbands, they look to outside show.”

“Nay, aunt, I think you are wrong there,” expostulated Katharine.

“Well, I don't exactly mean that, but they like fine speeches, all full of love and romance; they never think that those who can talk best about love, know least about it. Depend upon it, Katharine, no good comes of listening to those ‘here to-day and gone to-morrow’ sort of people; they are agreeable enough as long as they are with you, and then they go away and forget all about you, and talk the same romantic stuff to another girl in the next place they go to. I quite agreed with Sophia Thorpe the other day, when she was talking in this way; I really never heard her so sensible; and, for a wonder, she

got the better of Henrietta, who showed herself more romantic than I expected."

Katharine's cheek flushed in spite of herself: she could not misunderstand the allusion, and the idea that her own and Mr. Wentworth's proceedings had been discussed by such a trio as Mrs. Thorpe, Sophia, and Henrietta was not a pleasant one. But patience! a few weeks, and surely they would all see that he was not the frivolous capricious being they imagined him.

As tea was now over, she tried to escape further conversation on this subject, by proposing a walk in the garden. She wanted to see if the geraniums were still flourishing in the dial-garden, and thither she and Mrs. Thorpe directed their steps. The discussion of flowers and fruits occupied the time till Katharine thought she might venture to propose putting on her bonnet, and walking homewards, and] as the evening was rather cloudy and threatening, her aunt did not raise any objection.

"Only," said she, "you must wait a minute till I get a basket of jargonelle pears I put away this morning for your father. He likes them, I know, and you have not a tree good for anything at Hazel Bank."

"I can go and put on my bonnet in the meantime," said Katharine.

"No, love: wait a minute, and I will go up-stairs with you; I want to show you the new cap Henrietta chose for me at M—— the other day; I will just step into the dairy first and get the pears," and Mrs.

Thorpe as she spoke opened the low door which led down two or three steps into the dairy.

Katharine remained behind, thinking her aunt would return immediately. However, Mrs. Thorpe apparently found something to occupy her attention, for Katharine walked twice round the garden and yet she did not reappear; and on pushing open the door, and looking within the cool, half-dark room, Katharine saw no one there. She lingered for a few moments, and then determined to enter the house, thinking that perhaps Mrs. Thorpe did not intend to come out again, but expected that she would follow her through the dairy, when she was startled by hearing a step behind her, and, turning quickly round, she saw Philip Thorpe. He evidently expected to see her, for he was advancing eagerly and hastily. It was too late to retreat by the dairy door, besides Katharine was too much surprised to think of doing so, and after all, it would only have been a fruitless and childish proceeding, so she stood rooted to the ground till he came up.

“Katharine,” was all he said when he reached her, words seemed to fail him.

She had by this time regained her self-possession, and her, “Well, Philip, how do you do?” was spoken in a tone as unconcerned as usual.

Philip was too much occupied with the delight of finding her alone and of having an opportunity of speaking with her for the first time since the memor-

able day of the flower show, to notice anything of coldness in her manner, so, after he had a little collected his thoughts, he began—

“I am so glad you are here to-night. I never grumbled at anything so much as that tiresome journey, just at the time when I thought of writing once, but I could not manage it: Katharine, you know what I want to say. You *must* know, for I have shown you a hundred times what I felt, or partly so, at any rate. It would be difficult to show or speak a tenth part of the love I have felt for you since—ever since I knew my own thoughts and you were almost a child.”

“We are cousins, Philip,” commenced Katharine, “and it would be strange if we did not like each other, but you——”

“Stop, Katharine; don’t let us have any nonsense about cousins or liking each other. You know as well as I do, what I mean: that I love you as my own life, Katharine; that you are the one being who binds me to this place; and that it is the hope of seeing you *my wife*, that makes me bear the hateful, tedious drudgery of the life I lead. Katharine, you know it; you cannot misunderstand me.”

Katharine almost trembled: Philip under the influence of deep emotion seemed a different being; his voice was firm yet full of feeling, and the steady light of earnest purpose shone out of his eyes, that, at other times, were almost unexpressive. His manner

had lost all the hesitation which had at first marked it; and he now stood upright and dignified before her, sueing, indeed, for her favour, yet with a manly decided bearing as of one fitted to be her master. Strange, that the mere fact of speaking his love should have so changed him.

Common-place forms rose to Katharine's lips, and died away again; to say she was sorry—that she felt grateful for his preference, but could not return it—that she hoped he would forget—words like these, spoken to him, seemed conventional and a mockery; ignorance of his attachment she could not plead; she knew that he would scorn her for any phrase which even implied it. So she stood silent, her frank, fearless eyes no longer daring to meet his gaze, but cast half guiltily on the ground.

“Katharine, why don't you speak?—or, if you will not speak, why don't you look at me? You cannot be astonished at what I say; you have known it for years, though often you seemed unconscious, and *would* not understand. Speak: tell me you have some little love to give for all mine; surely, I did not deceive myself when—but never mind that. Only tell me at once; I cannot bear suspense now—I have borne it long enough, God knows.”

“I cannot say anything you will like to hear, Philip,” said Katharine, in a meek, subdued tone. “You have deceived yourself if you thought I returned your affection.”

“But you knew I loved you.”

“I hoped you did not care so very much,” began Katharine.

“Not care much!” repeated Philip, with a half-contemptuous accent. “How do you suppose a man shows his love? Mine was plain enough for your eyes to read.”

“If I read it, I at least tried——” “to check it,” she was about to add, but the memory of the flower-show day came across her.

“You were cold enough at times, I know,” said Philip, “but you varied, and I suppose I chose to believe the brighter side. I *will* believe it yet, Katharine; you never could have spoken and looked as you did the last day we met, if you cared nothing for me. I *will* not think it of you.”

“I am sorry if I have led you into a mistake, Philip. I should have been more careful.”

He interrupted her, almost fiercely—

“Let us have done with these smooth speeches, Katharine. Do not be afraid to speak the truth to me. Do you mean to tell me that on that day when I kept aloof from you, and you called me to you, if not with words, at least with looks which were still dearer, you meant *nothing*?”

There was no answer.

“Katharine, you marked your preference for me on that day in a hundred trifling things; it is true you gave me no opportunity to say the words I

wished to speak, but you certainly acted—and before the eyes of others too—as if those words would not have been unwelcome. I am easily enough chilled by neglect from *you*, Katharine, as you can surely remember, and I do not think I should be likely to imagine marks of preference where none existed. If you did not mean them for me, in the name of all that is true and honest, what did you mean?”

“Philip, don’t speak in that way ; be satisfied with what I have told you. I cannot love you, and I never wished you to think I did,” replied Katharine, but her voice shook, and her eyes showed that she felt conscious of deserving reproof.

Philip looked at her ; felt her half-pleading gaze, but his anger was roused. He turned almost scornfully from her.

“The way with you women ! You can stoop to any deceit to gain your ends, and then take shelter in your weakness, and implore us to believe you mean no harm. But, Katharine, you will never deceive me more. I can read what your purpose was. If you did not mean *me* to think you loved me, you meant another person to think so. I see it now : I was to be the decoy to lure on another ; I have heard of such things before, but from you—I could not have believed it. My truthful, spotless Katharine ! whom I almost worshipped for her goodness, to prove so mean and little. Well, you found

me a willing tool: much success may your manœuvres have brought you!"

"Philip, you are cruel now, and ungenerous to taunt me so," said Katharine, her meekness deserting her, and the colour rushing to her cheeks.

"If I am just, it is all you can expect; you do not know what I have lost. I could have borne to miss your love, if you had honestly shown me I could not gain it; but to lose you altogether! to know that the Katharine I loved has no real existence, and that I have been duped by one of the mere, every-day coquetting misses of the world; played off before a rival's eyes, to stir up his slumbering liking and then cast aside again when the purpose was gained. It is easy for those to be generous who cannot feel; those who feel as I do, Katharine, may be excused. If you meet with feelings strong as mine in those whom you consider models of generosity, you may think yourself fortunate."

"This is too much," said Katharine; "it is unmanly to impute motives to me which no woman should be required to prove false. I am willing to own that I was inconsiderate in my behaviour towards you, but you have no right to inquire my reasons. If your suspicions are correct, I own I deserve blame, but until you know they are so, you should not tax me with the meanness of wishing to gain——" Katharine paused; shame stopped her utterance. She knew that Philip, harsh as he might appear, was

only just in his anger; just also in his conjectures. She *had* played him off against a rival; and she shrank in agony from the thought that he knew it. He, the unsuccessful wooer, must thus be aware that she loved another, and alas! that other had not yet, in formal words, asked for her love. He might never ask for it, and she should have to live in the mortifying conviction that the man whose feelings she had slighted knew of her unrequited attachment.

Philip saw her confusion, her fruitless attempts at dignity, and her heart-felt shame, and he pitied her.

The word unmanly, too, stung him; and he acknowledged that perhaps his taunts were cowardly, such as he had no right to inflict on a woman's delicacy. What answer could be returned to them, without betraying much that maidenly modesty would wish to conceal?

He said therefore, in a changed voice, more sad and less reproachful—

“I will not speak any more about it, Katharine. One thing you may depend upon; I shall not tease you with entreaties for your love or professions of my own. I see clearly that you do not care for me, and that nothing on my part could ever influence you, even if you were what I once fancied you. It will be painful to meet you, and to speak to you; and you may be satisfied that I shall avoid you as much as possible.”

“I hope you will not always avoid me,” said

Katharine, timidly, "you are angry as well as sorry now ; some day surely we shall be friends again, and forget this miserable affair."

Philip shook his head.

"It is easy for you to anticipate calm, cousinly friendship ; as for me, I have thought of you too much to settle down into anything of the kind. Besides, I must learn to consider you in a new character. You are not the Katharine I loved ; and the Katharine that I now think you, I almost hate. But I frighten you," he added, with a gloomy smile ; "such violent words do not suit your nature ; you are accustomed to more gentle treatment."

Katharine feared that he was relapsing into the old strain, and a repetition of insinuations about Mr. Wentworth was more than she could bear, so with a hasty "Good evening," she ran past him into the house. Into the house and up-stairs ; she could not enter the parlour and face Mrs. Thorpe at this moment. She went into the bedroom where she had left her bonnet and mantle, and closed the door. She sat down for a few minutes and tried to compose herself. Her knees were trembling, and she could scarcely have stood any longer. She saw in the glass too, that her cheeks and lips were ashy pale, and when she tried to arrange her hair, before putting on her bonnet, her hands shook so, she was obliged to stop. She had always dreaded this time, but she had never imagined that it would move her thus. She had

fancied [Philip despairing, imploring, pertinacious, nay reproachful ; but never stern and scornful as he had shown himself. She had never dreamt of feeling so cowed, so crouching in his presence ; never dreamt of his words probing the secret shame of her heart. He knew she loved ; he knew that she stooped to deception on account of her love ; there was a world of bitterness in the very thought. Never could she see him again without the consciousness that he knew her weakness ; even if her dearest hopes were realized, she must bow her head in shame, knowing that he had read her haste, her anxiety to be won ; to stir what he called a “slumbering liking.” Oh, it was painful, it was humiliating to think that any human being could “read her so true.”

Katharine stayed but a few minutes alone, yet a host of unwelcome thoughts passed through her mind. Mechanically, as her fingers recovered their firmness, she tied her bonnet-strings, and fastened her mantle, and then, seeing that her lips no longer betrayed emotion by their unusual paleness, she descended the stairs. She met Mrs. Thorpe in the passage.

“ Oh, Katharine, only think of Philip coming home ! Of course you have seen him, for I told him you were in the garden. I was so astonished when Mary came to the dairy door, and said—‘ Here’s Mr. Philip, ma’am. I was just getting the pears for you, you know, and I ran away in too great

a hurry to call you. I dare say you thought I was lost. But where's Philip? I don't suppose he has had his dinner; however, most likely he wants to walk home with you, and I see you have your bonnet on."

"Oh, no," said Katharine; "he must not leave you this evening."

"But it looks like rain, child; you had better have the pony-carriage. I will see about it, and those pears—after all, I left them in the dairy," and Mrs. Thorpe hurried away to look for them. Katharine stood waiting in the passage till she returned. "Here are the pears, Katharine, and Philip is coming, I see, so I will tell him to order the pony-carriage and drive you home."

"Oh, no — no, aunt Thorpe," said Katharine, earnestly; "there is not the least occasion for it," and she shook hands, and tried to escape. But Philip by this time appeared at the garden door, and Mrs. Thorpe called out to him.

"Indeed it will not rain; I shall be at home in no time," said Katharine, endeavouring to draw away her hand from her aunt's clasp.

"Philip, Katharine does not like to take you from home to-night, but it seems to me too like rain for her to walk."

"It is rather gloomy," said Philip, in an indifferent tone.

"But will she be caught in the rain, do you think?"

“I don’t know,” said Philip, turning to the door, and looking vaguely at the sky. “No; I dare say not, if she walks quickly.”

“There, you see I am right, aunt Thorpe,” said Katharine, and, having succeeded in releasing her hand, and seizing the basket of pears, she darted through the passage, opened the front door, and was out of the house immediately.

It certainly was a gloomy evening, but Katharine, at this moment, would not have heeded the heaviest shower that ever fell. It was an inexpressible relief to be away from the Grange, away from Philip and Philip’s mother; and the chance of being drenched was not worth consideration. She walked rapidly through the fields, her speed indicating the vehemence of her thoughts. But by degrees, feelings of a calmer, sweeter nature stole over her, and she began to dream of a time when the mortification and shame she now experienced, would be forgotten in the full content of acknowledged and returned affection. Some day, perhaps, she would smile at her present distress, and frankly display before Philip the attachment which she was now ashamed to own. He would be once more her friendly cousin, not her stern judge, so terrible in his very strength of feeling.

The heavy clouds which had looked so threatening when Katharine started, had been growing murkier and blacker during her walk, and the increasing

darkness at length roused her attention ; she looked up, and a heavy rain-drop fell on her face.

She had by this time left the fields and entered the road, but she had still a considerable distance to walk ; far enough, at least, to ensure her a thorough wetting from the shower that now commenced. She did not care for it, however, in her present excitement ; neither did she pay much heed to the vivid flashes of lightning, which, at another time, might have awakened her awe.

Fast and heavy fell the thunder-drops, and Katharine hastened along at her utmost speed, but the rain beat against her, and her progress was slow. Her strength began to fail her, and as she returned by degrees to her usual state of mind, she became more sensible of the difficulties she had to encounter, and the loneliness of her situation during a storm which was now really fearful.

At length she became aware of another sound mingled with the splashing rain and the pealing thunder ; she could distinguish the rumbling of wheels, the swift trot of a horse's feet, and then her own name called in a loud voice.

She turned round hastily ; it was, as she expected, the pony-carriage from the Grange, and, as she did *not* expect, Philip was driving.

She stopped till he came up, but did not speak.

"Get up ; be quick, Katharine," said Philip, in his old voice and manner, as he checked the pony's

speed, and Katharine promptly obeyed. It was strange now to be seated by him, as she had been a hundred times before, but nothing in his manner reminded her of the scene in the garden, and she felt at the present moment almost thankful for his arrival.

A few minutes' drive brought them to Hazel Bank, and during the time, there was no need for them to break silence.

As they drove up to the door it was thrown wide open, and the whole family crowded into the passage, and for a minute nothing could be heard but exclamations of—"What a storm!" "Katharine, you are half drowned! Philip, come in at once! The kitchen fire is the best place for both of you!" &c.

But Philip declined all invitation.

"I must go home directly; I have only just arrived there, and my mother expects me back again."

"But not through the storm and rain," said Mrs. Rivers.

"The storm has spent its strength," said Philip, pointing to the sky, which was becoming less lurid, "and the rain has almost ceased. Good night, all of you. You are not very wet, I hope, Katharine?" he added, as he passed her. "I would not have let you go alone if I had thought the storm was so near."

"No; I am sure you would not," said Katharine.

heartily glad to find his tone so friendly. He did not, however, take the hand she held out to him, but hastily retreated, ran down the steps, and, jumping into the pony-carriage, was soon out of sight.

The door was closed, and Katharine submitted to a course of drying and warming. She was not sorry to find that every one was so occupied concerning her bodily comfort that her mental condition was unnoticed ; and that she could indulge her own thoughts without the risk of being considered absent, and without even Hester making inquiries about the fluttered state of her spirits, which her sisterly penetration would otherwise have speedily discovered. She made no opposition to her mother's suggestion that she should go to bed ; and, lulled by the delicious feeling of warmth and rest after her discomforts, her mental troubles subsided, and she soon fell into a sleep, which was only disturbed by delightful dreams, in which not Philip Thorpe, but another person played the principal part.

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